

MISSIONAL IMAGINATION IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

A Thesis-project

Submitted to the Faculty of
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Norman E. Curlee

December 2019

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DEDICATION

This work is humbly dedicated

To my wife, First Lady Deloris Curlee for untiring support and love,

To my children: Norman E. Curlee, II. Normanda E. Curlee, and Jonathon E. Curlee,

for your patience, many sacrifices and understanding,

To my mother, Annie Mae Curlee, who was called home to be with the Lord during the course of

this work, for your inspiration and motivation that allowed me to pursue paths of higher

education,

To my church family, Word Alive Church.

To God be the glory!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this work would not have been possible without the dedication, loyalty, professional commitment and nurturing of the following Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary faculty supporters: my dissertation chair and academic mentor, Dr. Emmett G. Price, III, Professor of Worship, Church and Culture, Dean of Chapel, Executive Director of the Institute for the Study of the Black Christian Experience, my residency advisor, Dr. Stephen W. Klipowicz (Retired), Director of Ministry Formation, Ministry Program Mentor and Residency Advisor, and my residency advisor, and, Dr. Timothy Laniak, Dean of the Charlotte Campus and Professor of Old Testament and Residency Advisor and Mentor for the Christian Leadership Doctor of Ministry Track. I thank you for living up to the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary's promise "to develop Christian leaders who are thoughtful, globally aware, spiritually mature..." Through God's grace, you have prepared me to be "ready" to expand God's ministry. May God continue to bless and keep you.

ABSTRACT

Missional Imagination in the African American Church was conducted as a hybrid study using mixed-methods methodology that involved collecting, analyzing and integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques as exploratory research study. Primarily using descriptive qualitative comparative exploratory research study analysis, the thesis-project was conducted with the goal of mining information obtained from fourteen pastors of African American churches to gain an in-depth understanding of how pastors understood the issue of missional imagination, in their own words and through their own voices. Three resounding themes illuminated from the pastors' responses: Comprehensive Vision, Community Engagement, and Biblical Insight/Resources.

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PREFACE

Emergence of the “Black” Church

The term African American church or Black church refers to Protestant churches that currently or historically have ministered to predominantly black congregations in the United States.¹ While some black churches are affiliates of predominantly African American denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), many black churches are members of predominantly white denominations, such as the United Church of Christ, which developed from the Congregational Church of New England.²

African American sociologist and author, E. Franklin Frazier situates the critical, historic emergence of the Black Church. Frazier writes:

Negro Americans had to make their own family institutions. White Americans, who became white because they had black slaves, having made Christians of their field hands, did not want to commune with them from the same cup. Hence, at birth, confirmation, communion, marriage, death, and all the great turning points and festivals, Negro and white were alien to each other.³

From its inception, the African American church was founded by enslaved Africans and its very foundation exists as a direct result of the oppressed Black community’s persistent fight for identity and freedom.⁴

1. Michael Battle, *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

2. Mary Pattillo-McCoy. "Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community," *American Sociological Review* (1998): 767-784.

3. E. Franklin Frazier, and C. Eric Lincoln. *The Negro Church in America*. (Liverpool, NY: Schocken Books, Inc., 1974, p. 5).

4. Raphael G. Warnock. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013).

The Christian community in the United States and over the world has its foundation in the tragic and hopeful reality that sustains and empowers African Americans' resistance to forces designed to destroy Black people and their souls.⁵

After slavery was abolished, segregationists' attitudes in both the North and the South discouraged and even prevented African Americans from worshiping in the same churches as whites.⁶ Freed blacks most often established congregations and church facilities separate from their white neighbors, who were often their former masters.⁷ These new churches created communities and worship practices that were culturally distinct from other churches, including unique and empowering forms of Christianity that hybridized African spiritual traditions.⁸

Most of the first black congregations and churches formed before 1800 were founded by free blacks, for example, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Springfield Baptist Church (Augusta, Georgia); Petersburg, Virginia; and Savannah, Georgia.⁹ The oldest black Baptist church in Kentucky, and third oldest in the United States, was founded about 1790 by the slave Peter Durrett.¹⁰ As a result of the systemic view of African Americans as invisible Christians, seven modern-day African American denominations developed.¹¹ The historic African American denominations include:

5. James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

6. Pattillo-McCoy, "Church Culture."

7. Cone, "The Cross."

8. Cone, "The Cross."

9. Cone, "The Cross."

10. Cone, "The Cross."

11. Chatters, L. M., et al. (2009). Race and ethnic differences in religious involvement: African Americans, Caribbean blacks and non-Hispanic whites. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 32(7), 1143-1163.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME); The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ); The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME); The Church of God in Christ (COGIC); Baptist, including: The National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC), and The Progressive National Baptist Association (PNBA); United Methodist Church (UMC); and Presbyterian Church (USA).¹²

Nearly eight-in-ten African Americans (79%) identify as Christians.¹³ More than half of all African American adults in the United States (53%) are classified as members of the historically Black Protestant tradition.¹⁴

One formalization of theology based on themes of black liberation is the Black theology movement.¹⁵ In 2008, approximately one quarter of African American churches followed a liberation theology.¹⁶ The Black Liberation theology can be traced to July 31, 1966, when a group of 51 Black pastors, calling themselves the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC), purchased a full-page ad in *The New York Times* to publish their "Black Power Statement" which proposed a more aggressive approach to combating racism using the Bible for inspiration.¹⁷ Black liberation theology was first systematized by James Cone and Dwight Hopkins.¹⁸

12. C. Eric Lincoln and H. Mamiya Lawrence, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

13. Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study*, 2014. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/07/5-facts-about-the-religious-lives-of-African-Americans/>

14. Pew, "Religious Landscape."

15. Chatters, et al., *Race and Ethnic Differences*.

16. Chatter, "Race and Ethics."

17. Chatter, "Race and Ethics."

18. Chatter, "Race and Ethics."

They are considered the leading theologians of this system of belief, although now there are many scholars who have contributed a great deal to the field.¹⁹ In 1969, Cone published the seminal work that laid the basis for black liberation theology, *Black Theology and Black Power*. In the book, Cone asserts that not only was black power not alien to the Gospel, it was, in fact, the Gospel message for all of 20th century America.²⁰ Walter Fluker points out that various worldviews have proven to have complex and aggravating features that impacted the way Black leaders, especially some contemporary Black church leaders, understand themselves and their respective missions.²¹

Thus, African American churches or the Black Church has long been the center of communities, serving as school sites in the early years after the Civil War, taking up social welfare functions, such as providing for the indigent, and going on to establish schools, orphanages and prison ministries.²²

Emmett Price, III provides a contemporary analysis of the impact of race and power in the development of the African American Church. Price states:

From its very emergence, during slavery, the Black Church was a response to the systemic and obstructive oppression at the hand of those with political power and economic means.²³

19. Chatter, “Race and Ethics.”

20. Cone, “The Cross.”.

21. Walter Earl Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted: The Future of the Black Church in Post-Racial America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016), 38.

22. A. B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

23. Emmett G. Price III, ED., *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), xi.

As a result, black churches have fostered strong community organizations and provided spiritual and political leadership, especially during the civil rights movement.²⁴ Historically the Black church has been a place for creating individual, systemic, and political change within the Black community.²⁵

24. Price, “Black Church.”

25. Price, “Black Church.”

CHAPTER ONE

THE MISSION OF THE BLACK CHURCH

As introduced in the preface, from its emergence in the late 18th century to its present day relevance, the African American Church or the Black Church has and will always serve as a safe haven for African Americans, a place to worship God together, and a place where African Americans are motivated to rebuild Black communities.²⁶

Understanding Mission[s], Missiology, and Missional Imagination

There is often inherent confusion for many, non-theologians and laypersons alike related to distinguishing the meaning of the terms mission and missions, as well as, missiology, and missional imagination.²⁷ Definitions may be quite dangerous as they can either confuse or clarify.²⁸ For purposes of this thesis, the subsequent discussion is devoted to providing concise definitions and clarity among the terms and concepts of mission, missions, missiology, and missional imagination. It is important to understand from the outset, that the terms are not complete opposites or exclusive of one another. Rather, the terms are interrelated and are best discussed through co-narration.

26. Pinn, “Black Church.”

27. Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI:Baker Books, 2011).

28. Ed Stetzer, *What Is a Missiologist? The Theology, Tools, and Team of a Missiologist.* <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/june/what-is-missiologist.html>. June 2013.

Mission and Missions

The terms mission and missions are distinct and yet integrated.²⁹ The terms are best understood as not mutually exclusive, but operate best when they are both incorporated and applied in a realistic, local church.³⁰ As such, mission refers to the activities, deeds or plans organized for the purpose to spread Christianity. Inherent to understanding the term mission, one should understand that God's mission calls, sends and directs the Christian church to operate as a missionary church within the confines of its own communities and cultures, with the ultimate goal of bringing, sending, and sharing God's love.³¹

Missional and Missiology

As an extension of mission and missions, missional is the adoption of dispositions, behaviors, and practices of Christian living for the purpose of engaging others with the gospel message.³² While, missiology refers to the study of the church's mission with regard to missionary activity.³³

Missional Imagination

Missional Imagination prepares Christians to search and observe the many ways the kingdom of God is already operating, especially within the confines of the local churches and communities.³⁴ Missional Imagination reminds us that God is constantly and

29. Stetser, "What is a Missiologist."

30. Alan Hirsch, *The Word is Everywhere, But Where Did it Come From and What Does it Really Mean?* <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2008/fall/17.20.html> (accessed 2018).

31. Hirsch, "The Word."

32 Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, (2011)).

33. Roxburgh, "Missional."

34. Missional Wisdom Foundation. <https://www.missionalwisdom.com/news/2017/8/9/missional-imagination>. August 2017.

deliberately at work.³⁵ The operative in Missional Imagination is that in the Christian journey for searching God's work, Christians must realize their own connection and engage in fulfilling God's work.³⁶

1.1. Statement of the Research Topic

Historically, based on their church missions, African American churches have provided critical community and world-wide programs through social action ministries and missions, such as food and clothing drives, homelessness programs, prison ministries, family-oriented events, assistance with housing costs and utilities, activities for children and youth, and countless others. However, a major problematic is that these ministries and missions often reflect the direct needs and desires of those people already attending, but do not necessarily reflect the needs of those in the community because they are not developed through genuine engagement and direct conversation with the community.³⁷ Additionally, the African American church is historically operated based on an autocratic, top-down leadership model. A truly devoted missional church does not focus on itself, its delegated mission or on the leader's personal agenda, but on what God is doing in the neighborhood.³⁸ Thus, a missional imagination is not about the church in and of itself or the church's mission or specifically on the church leader, but focuses on the Holy Spirit's calling the church on a journey beyond its walls and its internal focus.

35. Missional Wisdom Foundation, History.

36. Robert M. Mulholland Jr, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

37. Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (Hoboken: NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 17.

38. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

1.2. Research Purpose and Design

The overall purpose of this thesis-project was to examine the theological phenomenon of missional imagination from the perspective of church leaders from selected African American churches, particularly from the vantage point of understanding how the leaders addressed the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities and to address international issues among Blacks in the diaspora. My sincere hope was that through this project-thesis, I would investigate the issue and provide practical insight for church leaders. Further, I had hoped that this project-thesis would illuminate the reality of church leaders expending their time, energy and efforts in fulfilling the church's mission or in some cases towards their own personal agendas, instead of truly searching to find out what God's mission is for the church and the community.

1.3. Guiding Research Questions

The following questions guided this research effort:

- What can be learned about developing a Missional Imagination in the African American church? (Interpretive Question)
- How can a Missional Imagination be developed within the context of a top-down leadership model within the African American church? (Interpretive Question)
- How can a Missional Imagination be developed in the African American church while respecting its culture practices? (Interpretive Question)
- What biblical-theological insight can be used as examples in developing a Missional Imagination in the African American church? (Normative Question)
- How can future ministry in the African American church be enhanced through the development of a Missional Imagination? (Pragmatic Question)

1.4. Research Methods

Qualitative Methodology

This thesis-project employed research methodology based upon best, proven practices in research. This thesis-project employed descriptive qualitative analysis as a guiding research philosophy, employing survey research methodology. In order to provide a comprehensive platform to address the aforementioned guiding research questions, this thesis-project examined: (1) the perceptions of missional imagination of church leaders from selected African American churches, (2) how these church leaders addressed the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities, and (3) how these church leaders addressed international issues among Blacks in the diaspora. Creswell suggests that qualitative research is used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem.³⁹ Qualitative research methodology best provides access to the critical knowledge held by the church leaders of African American churches that was excavated in the research process in the attempt to shed light on the critical thesis-project topic, *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*. Creswell further points out that qualitative data collection methods vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques, including focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, participation/observations, and survey research, the selected design for this thesis.⁴⁰

This thesis-project surveyed 14 church leaders of African American churches regarding the identification, development, implementation and impact of ministries and mission programs. Creswell suggests that survey methodology is often the best way to get information and

39. J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd. ed. (Washington, DC: Sage Publishers, 2009), 121.

40. Creswell, “Research Design.”.

feedback used in planning and program improvement.⁴¹ Flyvbjerg adds that through strategic design and implementation, a survey is a systematic process used in gathering information on a specific topic by asking questions of individuals and then generalizing the results to the groups represented by the respondents.⁴² As a strategic design, the researcher selected a sample of respondents from a population (i.e. the African- American church) and administered a standardized questionnaire to them.⁴³ As suggested, the questionnaire, or survey, can be a written document that is completed by the person being surveyed (i.e. African American church leaders), via an online questionnaire, a face-to-face interview, or a telephone interview.⁴⁴ Therefore, survey design was selected as the most accessible methodology for acquiring the requisite knowledge to gain a greater understanding of the topic at hand, *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*.

1.5. Conceptual Frameworks and Theoretical Models (Research Lens)

Swinton and Mowat's⁴⁵ four elements of Practical Theology were utilized as the conceptual framework and as the guiding theoretical model to investigate the topic, *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*. Importantly, Swinton and Mowat provide a foundational context and understanding of the significant role and impact the human experience plays in Practical Theology.⁴⁶

41. Creswell, "Research Design."

42. Bent Flyvbjerg, *Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research* (Denmark: Aalborg University Press, 2006). <http://qix.sagepub.com/content/12/2/219.short>, 105.

43. Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstanding."

44. Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstanding."

45. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. (London, UK, Student Christian Movement Press, 2016).

46. Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*

Swinton and Mowat help us to understand that human experience is presumed to be an important locus for the work of the Spirit.⁴⁷ This thesis-project was guided on the key points offered concerning practical theology:

- First, Practical Theological inquiry is critical.
- Second, Practical Theology is theological reflection.
- Third, Practical Theology is not simply the practices of the church and the experiences of Christians. The theological reflection that is Practical Theology also embraces the practices of the world.
- Fourth, the primary task of Practical Theology is to ensure and enable faithful practices.⁴⁸ In the context of practices and traditions within the African American Church, this thesis-project was designed to provide a platform to hear the stories and to learn from the human experiences of church leaders of African American churches. This inquiry is critical because of the deep meanings that rest in the background of many of the practices within the African American Church.

An important perspective to consider in the research process was that both scripture and theological traditions always emerge from some personal context connected with human experience.⁴⁹ Therefore, the paramount focus of the research process in the thesis-project was discovery and reflection from a theological perspective. This led to acknowledgement of Scripture in the quest of developing a hermeneutical framework.

I believe God is at work in the world in which a missional imagination will lead and redirect the African American church. The aims of Practical Theology go far beyond mere

47. Swinton and Mowat, “Practical Theology.”

48. Swinton and Mowat, “Practical Theology.”

49. Swinton and Mowat, “Practical Theology.”

understanding of the world but following actions that will change it.⁵⁰ This thesis-project employed the model of Practical Theology to inquire into the practices of the world. Understanding the culture in which the African American church finds itself is of great importance relative to going into the culture of the world with the good news of Christ. As a result of God's creation, we live in a world where all human beings, whether knowingly or not, engage in the great reveal of the story and life of God.⁵¹ Swinton and Mowat offer that the task of Practical Theology purposefully reminds the Church of the subtle ways in which it differs from the world and safeguards that its practices constantly remain faithful to the script of the gospel.⁵²

Further, I believe God is working through all people and all groups. The African American church with a missional imagination will be purposefully established to offer organizational structure, leadership development, economic management and so forth that will allow the church to be the platform for God's hands and feet in taking the good news into the world. Thus, I provided some practical disciplines that will encourage and equip the African American church to live out its faith in communicating the gospel outside of its walls and out into the world. I am confident the Practical Theology method will be carried out through the research of others who have studied this topic and written on it, inclusive of Scripture and personal experiences of myself and others.

50. Swinton and Mowat, "Practical Theology."

51. Swinton and Mowat, "Practical Theology."

52. Swinton and Mowat, "Practical Theology."

1.6. Significance of Research

This thesis-project illuminated implications for providing some practical disciplines and directives in developing a missional imagination in the African American church through its organization structure, the spiritual development of leadership and laity, respecting of cultural practices, and the reaching out into the neighborhood and world in genuine relational building with passion and compassion for the lost. The project has the potential of exploring new ways of interpreting, experiencing and acting out God's mission (i.e. missional imagination) and that engaging in God's mission (not the church's mission). There are possibilities for changing the very identity and culture of the African American church to better serve the world.⁵³

Chapter 2 provided a theological framework for this study. Also, the chapter summarized selected Biblical themes and examined how the scriptures speak to Missional Imagination.

Chapter 3 reviewed the scholarly literature available and discussed research that has already been completed on Missional Imagination.

Chapter 4 described the survey and interview instruments used to conduct the qualitative study.

Chapters 5 and 6 presented the research findings and conclusions based upon the findings.

53. Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

As aforementioned in chapter one, this thesis-project examined the theological phenomenon of missional imagination from the perspective of church leaders from selected African American churches, particularly from the vantage point of understanding how the leaders addressed the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities and to address international issues among Blacks in the diaspora. This chapter explored selected passages that inform a biblical-theological understanding of missional imagination.

As an African American pastor and church leader for over twenty years of ministry, I have witnessed a strong focus and commitment to mission programs. The ministries I have keenly observed included, but were not limited to, the areas of preaching, singing, fellowship, politics, social justice, homelessness, incarceration, fund raising, revivals, and local and international missions. From my observations and direct experiences, the missions primarily focused on addressing needs identified by church leaders based upon the church's mission. At first sight, there was seemingly not an issue with an African American church aligning its ministries directly with the church's mission. However, upon much reflection and resonance based on the scholarly literature on missional imagination, an epiphany compelled me to further investigate the phenomenon of African American churches and missional imagination. My hope was that through this project-thesis, I would investigate the issue and provide practical insight for church leaders. Further, I had hoped that this project-thesis would illuminate the reality of church leaders expending their time, energy and efforts in fulfilling the church's mission or in some

cases towards their own personal agendas, instead of truly searching to find out what God's mission is for the church and the community.

Missional Imagination

The goal of the investigation was to assist African American church leaders in recognition of the very common practice and often-subtle difference in fulfilling the church's mission as opposed to clearly hearing and understanding God's mission and instructions for operating within communities. As previously alluded to, my sincere hope was that church leaders suspend the practice of focusing on the church's mission or on their personal agendas. Rather, my desire was to encourage church leaders to surrender their efforts to allow God's plan of redemption to be the priority within African American churches as they develop structure, training, biblical insight and resources to aid them in expressing God's love and plan for all mankind throughout the world with the focus on God's mission.

My observations of the approach of many African American churches to fulfill the church's mission was quite common. Historically, the church has realized the concept of missions or missional imagination as the action of the church sending out missionaries and representatives to accomplish tasks based on the church's identified mission.¹ As it pertains to its missional imagination, the church remains in a transforming state.² Through this sense of formation, the church must be willing to yield in order to move beyond mere planning for missional programs within the church. Rather, the church focuses on how the church can be more visible, purposeful in neighborhoods and in the world based upon what God is doing and what God intends.³

1. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, (The Missional Network. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2011).

2. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "Missional Church."

3. Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, (Allelon Missional. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 2011.

My major concern for the African American church was that I have not witnessed passion, strategic planning, spiritual development and commitment toward missions that focus on the advancement of the gospel within the local community and throughout the world within the African American church. Thus, I would like to engage and challenge African American churches to shift from the church trying to accomplish its missions to the imagining and carrying out God's mission. This is not to reflect a negative light on what is being done in the African American church. However, I believed there was a lack of attention given to the development of missional imagination based upon spiritual formation among the leadership and laity regarding taking the gospel beyond the walls of the church into the neighborhoods and into the world.

Two biblical passages well known for their importance in any discussion of missional imagination were found in the command given by Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Mark.

Matthew 28: 19-20

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.⁴

Mark 16:15

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."⁵

Roger Hedlund suggests, Jesus Christ sanctioned the Gentiles' mission and ordered the church to transform all nations into disciples.⁶ The operative point and Christian directive is that Jesus' commission to evangelism remains relevant for today's church and church leaders.

4. Matthew 28:19-20, (New International Version).

5. Mark 16:15, (New International Version).

6. Roger E. Hedlund, *Roots of the Great Debate in Mission* (Evangelical Literature Service, 1981).

Throughout the thread of Scripture, we find a missional God working through his missional church as his church is engaged in fulfilling the prophetic mandate of God in taking the message of God's kingdom into every part of the earth as stated by Jesus. Matthew writes:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)⁷

Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk clarify that the missional church is not about novel methods or programming for the church.⁸ Rather, the foundational philosophy of the missional church is anchored in how Christians and church leaders promote the church culture as an environment where God is the center of conversation and where God shapes the focus and work of the people.⁹ For many congregations, this thinking is a paradigm shift in imagination, belief, and living.¹⁰ Tangible missional leadership develops a cultural imagination and belief system for daily living within the church whereby the congregation discerns what God is up to and therefore enacts wisdom about what that means for them as members of their communities.¹¹

Chapter one discussed the primarily exercised autocratic leadership within the African American church that has a great influence on the missional imagination of the congregation. Therefore, the complex question arises as to how to cultivate missional imagination while respecting the historic cultural practices of the African American church within this predominant model of autocratic leadership.

7. Matthew 24:14, (New International Version).

8. Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk. *The missional leader: Equipping your church to reach a changing world.* (John Wiley & Sons, Vol. 17, 2011).

9. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

10. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

11. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

Further, Roxburgh and Romanuk point out that contrary to guiding philosophies, leadership is less concerned with enlightenment, but should illuminate the process of cultivation of the church environment that proclaims the missional imagination of all of God's people from every walk of life.¹² Thus, the church leader has the opportunity and responsibility for serving as the frontrunner in cultivating an environment and creating a culture for God's people to be empowered to discern what the Holy Spirit is doing and wisdom to understand how they fit into God's anointed plan.¹³ As a result, the congregation experiences a renewed energy, excitement, and desire to do God's divine will yielding the emergence of congregational life.¹⁴

Hedlund writes, "Mission takes place in the context of a people's culture and religion."¹⁵ As church leaders, I believe in valuing the culture of others and allowing the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of God's word as we share it within various cultural contexts. Therefore, we must be willing to learn and respect cultural diversity. John Stott suggests that it is often more common and certainly more convenient for church leaders to project the gospel at people from afar rather than involve themselves and immerse themselves in the direct culture of the people.¹⁶ Total immersion into the culture of others provides an opportunity to more keenly understand and minister to individuals.¹⁷

Cultural diversity is a common expression referring to all people and groups. However, the church must not only embrace cultural diversity, but also see the connection to other cultures as an opportunity to expand the gospel message beyond its comfort zone. Van Gelder and Zscheile point

12. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

13. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

14. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

15. Roger E. Hedlund, *Roots of the Great Debate in Mission* (Evangelical Literature Service, 1981

16. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, (InterVarsity Press, 2012).

17. Stott, "The Cross

out that within even the boundaries of the United States, increasingly, different societies, cultures, and religions continue to immerge.¹⁸ Neighborhoods in most U.S. communities, both urban and rural, observe a number of different faiths or have no faith at all.¹⁹ Cultural and religious diversity and multiple religious and non-religious perspectives and experiences are a reality in the U.S. and the world.²⁰ In order to achieve missional imagination, engagement with all people from a world perspective must be seriously considered. Nuances of the countless subcultures and multiple layers of difference, including between generations should not be ignored.²¹

In an environment where a top-down leadership model is used, God can cause his message to enter the context and bring transformation of hearts as the leadership and laity develops a mind and heart for spreading the gospel into their local neighborhoods and over the world. The top-down model of leadership is not viewed as a healthy way to mobilize the church. According to Roxburgh and Boren, attempting to achieve missional transformation from a platform of top-down leadership will result in the self-fulfilling prophecy of deflation of energy and assured decline of enthusiasm and interests as the people will never be permitted to have ownership.²² The operative in achieving missional imagination is the full empowerment of the people within the church to discern and develop actions that are generated among themselves rather than from strategies and programs proposed by leaders, anchored in God's plan of direction.²³

18. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "*Missional Church*."

19. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "*Missional Church*."

20. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "*Missional Church*."

21. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "*Missional Church*."

22. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "*Missional Church*."

23. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "*Missional Church*."

Thus, the African American church must shift the priority and become more proactive in taking the gospel outside its walls into the neighborhoods and over the world. In a top-down model of leadership of the African American churches, the church leadership has the responsibility to make missional imagination a priority in preaching and practice within the African American church.

Leonidas Johnson points out that African American pastors must decide which road they will chose to travel in the path towards achieving missional imagination.²⁴ African American church leaders must consider a number of factors, including, socioeconomic equality.²⁵ These pastors must choose whether they will led with the personal agenda of financial gain or truly embrace the hearts of underserved and unreached people all over the world.²⁶ Roxburgh and Boren suggest that a missional church does not focus on itself but on what God is doing in the neighborhood.²⁷ Thus, a missional imagination is not about the church in and of itself or the church's mission. Often, the focus is on making the church better, encouraging the unreached to come to the church, or how to revive a dying church.²⁸ However, although these are altruistic goals with good intentions, they do not have the focus and goal of a missional imagination.²⁹ The Holy Spirit is calling the church on a journey beyond its walls and its internal focus. Missional imagination compels the church to focus on our neighborhoods and communities and to listen

24. Leonidas A. Johnson, *The African American Church: Waking Up to God's Missionary Call*. 1959. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006).

25. Johnson, "African American Church."

26. Johnson, "African American Church."

27. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

28. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

29. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

genuinely to people to learn what they are experiencing and most importantly to find out what God is up to in those communities.³⁰ Rather than finding out how to attract people to the church, the paramount discovery should be how church leaders and Christians can change in order to engage the people in the community who do not recognize the church as a relevant part of their lives.³¹

My concern is that the African American church must no longer look at the world from a negative viewpoint and view the world from God's perspective and with the compassion of Christ. This mindset of the African American church must take place if African American churches are going to develop a missional imagination that leads the church into the world with the good news of Christ.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."³²

Roxburgh and Romanuk clarify that the typical approach and assumption for many churches is to connect the community and neighborhood people into programs designed by the church.³³ However, the major problem is that these programs often reflect the needs of the congregants, but fails to reflect the needs the outside community through sincere engagement and involvement with the community.³⁴ Church leaders must learn how to ask direct questions

30. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

31. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

32. Matthew 9:35-38, (New International Version).

33. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

34. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

that encourage meaningful conversation about the shape of mission and witness in the specific places where members live and work.³⁵

I believe developing a thesis-project on missional imagination within the African American church will continually encourage the African American church to reconsider its approaches to mission work. This progressive development will be spiritual in nature and work within the context of culture and ministry practices, embracing a Biblical perspective in reaching out with genuine relational building and compassion for the lost.

Throughout the thread of Scripture, we find a missional God working through his missional church as his church is engaged in fulfilling the prophetic mandate of God. The prophetic command involves taking the message of God's kingdom into every part of the earth as stated by Jesus, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

In addressing the topic of Missional Imagination, my project was based on biblical theological principles that illuminate:

- God's Missional engagement revealed in the Pentateuch.
- God's Missional engagement revealed through the ministry of the some of the Old Testament Major Prophets, as well as, the Minor Prophets.
- God's Missional engagement revealed through the gospels.
- God's Missional engagement revealed through the epistles.

After the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God speaks in a missional language concerning the future course of humankind. In examining the first five books of Moses, I reflected on various individuals and events that mirrored the missional part of God's plan leading toward the redemption of humankind. The prophets, both major and minor served as

35. Roxburgh and Romanuk. "Missional leader."

examples of witnesses to God's missional grace working through the life of Israel as well as other pagan nations in communicating his missional work in the earth. Here, the miracles and victories God provided his people under the Old Covenant and capture glimpses of God's missional work through these various historical and supernatural events within history.

In looking into the four gospels, I examined the life and ministry of Jesus and identified his missional assignment in the earth as seen through his life, ministry and redemptive work on the cross. I engaged Jesus' interaction with the various religious sects of his day and showed how their spiritual blindness continually caused conflict with Jesus as he sought to carry out his missional work among the people.

I reviewed the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul and other New Testament epistles as examples of God's work through their lives, testimonies, suffering and missionary work in revealing his missional call to his church.

Finally, I engaged the Scriptures for specific commands or instructions given to New Testament believers in fully understanding our responsibility and calling to be missional agents, engaging the world with the message of the Gospel in making disciples for the glory of God. This engagement does not limit itself to addressing spiritual needs only, but felt needs of those in our neighborhoods, communities, cities and worldwide.

Exegesis

Wright points out that the Bible is a narrative record of God's mission in and through his people for the sake of the world.³⁶ The Bible tells a story in which God's mission is a central thread realized through Israel's mission, Christ's mission, the Spirit's mission, the church mission.

36. Christopher JH Wright, "The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative." InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Wright suggests,

The whole Bible is itself a “missional” phenomenon. The writings that now compromise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God . . . Mission is not just one of a list of things the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in the much- abused phrase, “what it is all about.”³⁷

Thus, a faithful reading of Scripture is one that takes seriously a missional hermeneutic.³⁸

Kaiser contends before announcing a blessing directly to Abraham, there was a blessing that would come through Abraham referring back to a blessing already announced after the fall of Adam and Eve.³⁹ As God’s antidote to the curse brought on by sin, a male descendant from the woman Eve was promised.⁴⁰ In Genesis 3:15, God announces the curse upon the serpent. The scripture reads: “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.*⁴¹ Gohen views this announcement to restore the creation right after Adam and Eve’s treasonous act of rebellion as the story of God’s mission path he follows to make his goodness known to the ends of the earth.⁴² The mission of God’s people is to take their role in this drama. Kaiser states, “The curse affected the human race universally, but no less extensive in its healing potential was the promised antidote offered by God.”⁴³ Westermann asserts that the curse of alienation requires an

37. Wright, “Mission of God.”

38. Michael W. Gohen. “Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and Issues” InterVarsity Press, 2014.

39. Walter C. Kaiser. “The Great Commission in the Old Testament.” International Journal of Frontier Missions 13, no. 1 (1996): 3-7.

40. Kaiser, “Great Commission.”

41. Genesis 3:15 (New International Version).

42. Gohen, “Introducing Christian Mission.”

43. Kaiser, “Great Commission

act of reconciliation, and it is this act, both as event and process of biblical salvation.⁴⁴

Dumitrescu suggests that resulting from humans' fall, God had to add a new dimension to his mission on top of his creating activities of rescuing and restoring beings affected by sin.⁴⁵ Thus, God's mission reflected his character from the beginning. Further, since humans were created in God's image, he had to restore that image. This is the essence of the promise in Gen 3:15.⁴⁶ God's love responds to mankind's rebellion. God sees the needs of mankind and responds to those needs as he looks toward the future.

In *The Pentateuch*, James Smith's commentary and survey services of the Old Testament sees this announcement as a struggle between the two seeds that would reach its climax in a confrontation between Serpent himself and a single representation of the seed of the woman.⁴⁷ The Serpent will strike at the heel of this champion of righteousness. He will thereby inflict great pain upon him. Ultimately, however, the representative of the seed of the woman would crush the Serpent's head. Smith references Genesis 3:15 as to the victory of Messiah over Satan as found in the teaching of Galatians 4:4-5.⁴⁸ The scripture reads, "*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*"⁴⁹ Here, God sends his own Son with a missional assignment to restore harmony with his Creator. The Genesis narrative reveals

44. Claus Westermann. "Elements of Old Testament Theology." Westminster John Knox Press, 1982.

45. Cristian Dumitrescu. "Mission Theology in the Old Testament: A New Paradigm." *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 43-62.

46. Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology."

47. James E. Smith. "The Pentateuch." College Press, 2006.

48. Smith, "The Pentateuch."

49. Galatians 4:4-5 (New International Version).

the heart of a merciful God who initiates a plan of redemption that reached out to where man had fallen and sends Jesus with the mission of the restoration of humankind⁵⁰

God's missional activity is not only revealed in his response to the fall of mankind, but in his calling and sending Abram ("father is exalted").⁵¹ Abram is called by God to trust a plan that would require him to leave his homeland of Ur of the Chaldees, a prominent Sumerian city in order to migrate to Canaan, assuring him that he would become the father of a vast nation. In this missional call, God gives him the name of Abraham ("father of a multitude"). The promise God makes with Abram is recorded:

Genesis 12:1

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great.; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."⁵²

As Dumitrescu expresses, "Humanity is God's object of love."⁵³ Because sin has affected his relationship with humans, his desire is to restore it. In order to accomplish his goal, he either sends himself or chooses a messenger or an instrument to carry out his word or his actions. Abraham is chosen to become God's representative in a world corrupted by sin. Israel is the messenger sent to bring the blessings to all other peoples around them. Finally, God sends "his only begotten son" to accomplish the desired redemption of humanity.⁵⁴

God makes three promises to Abram. He would give him land, people and a great name. Also, he was promised that he would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. Then God declared that through Abram all families of the earth would be blessed.

50. Smith, "The Pentateuch."

51. Smith, "The Pentateuch."

52. Smith, "The Pentateuch."

53. Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology."

54. Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology."

Keil sees the statement of all families of the earth being blessed as a blessing to Abraham to unite the divided families, and change the curse, pronounced upon the ground because of sin, into a blessing for the whole human race.⁵⁵ They suggest that all further promises are not only to the patriarchs, but also to Israel, and were merely expansions and closer definitions of the salvation held out to the whole human race in the first promise. Kaiser states,

God's gift of a blessing through the instrumentality of Abraham was to be experience by nations, clans, tribes, people groups, and individuals. It would be for every size group, from the smallest people group to the greatest nation.⁵⁶

Dumitrescu does not see God's covenant with Abraham and Israel as a sign of favoritism (Amos 3:2; 9:7; Duet 10:17), but an act of God's mercy, to the point that even when Israel was under God's judgment, they remained God's people for God's mission.⁵⁷ Even while in exile they would prosper and increase in number as they were to seek the welfare of the city and pray for God's blessing on it. They were supposed to be not only the recipients of Abraham's promise, but also the agents of that blessing to their captor nations.⁵⁸

Abraham's obedience to God was extended to his son in allowing God to continue to fulfill his promise to Abraham as a missional God who seeks the salvation of all mankind. Just as Abraham had to respond in obedience to God in the fulling of God's missional call, so too would his son Isaac be required to do likewise.

There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the Lord appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. "Dwell

55. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch. "Commentary on the Old Testament." Titus Books, 2014.

56. Kaiser, "Great Commission."

57. Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology."

58. Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology."

in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. “And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; “because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my status, and my laws.”⁵⁹

Matthews believes the divine encounter is reminiscent of those experienced by Abraham, and the message repeats the promises sworn to Abraham, recalling his obedience at Mount Moriah (22:16-18).⁶⁰ He further suggests that although Abraham appears to be “all in all” for the realization of the promises, Isaac too must do his part, responding dutifully to the command set before him.⁶¹ As the theology of our passage shows throughout, the divine purpose of the call assumes human responsibility and accountability in an obedient response.

Deuteronomy 10:14-19

Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it. The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Dumitrescu cites Wright who explices Deuteronomy 10:14-19.

God chose Israel to be his partner in covenant, partner in character action towards both disadvantaged categories of people inside the nation, and other nations. The two parallel doxologies in Duet. 10:14-19 indicate that what God is doing for Israel is the same as he is doing for aliens and all marginalized people. “YHWH is the God who loves to love, and especially to love the needy and the alien.” He further suggest, “YHWH intervenes in

59. Genesis 26:1-5, New International Version.

60. Kenneth A. Matthews. “The New American Commentary: Genesis 11: 27-50: 26.” Broadman & Holman, 2005.

61. Matthews, “New American.”

the life and fortunes of pagan nations and he is able to do it without Israel's help. But he wants his people to go and bless other nations so they will recognize it is YHWH who appoints kings and deposes them. Israel's mission is to go and make God known by helping them understand God's role in their history.⁶²

Donbrell believes the way God will bless the nation is revealed more clearly in Exodus 19:3-6.⁶³ He advocates that the whole of the book of Exodus leads up to these words, which define Israel's role and identity in redemptive history. The imagery that the author of Exodus uses to describe what God does for Israel is, in his opinion, that of redemption (Exodus 6: 15:13). Redemption refers to the recovery of a son who once was part of a family but has been alienated. Redemption is the return of his son to his proper relationship. Israel as God's son (Exodus 4:22) is enslaved, but God intervenes to restore Israel to their proper place in God's family. He leads them out of Egypt, cares for them in the wilderness, and now brings them to himself at Sinai. Further, Donbrell suggests God chose Israel as his special possession; therefore, they will be bound to God in covenant and will hold a special place in God's redemptive purpose. Again, the universal horizon of God's redemptive intention is evident: "for the whole earth is mine" (Ex. 19:5). Israel is God's treasured possession for the sake of the whole earth.⁶⁴

In Exodus chapter twelve, God gives Moses the instructions for keeping the Passover, which signifies their final deliverance from Egypt. There is a missional God extending his covenant family beyond the boundaries of the Jewish people. It reads,

And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.⁶⁵

62. Dumitrescu, "Mission Theology."

63. William J. Dumbrell. "Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants." Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009, p. 66.

64. Dumbrell. "Covenant and Creation."

65. Exodus 12:48 (New International Version).

Circumcision was the mark of the covenant that God had given through Abraham to identify his people as part of his covenant family. Here is a witness of God extending his covenant family beyond the Jewish race as the mixed crowd among them was granted an opportunity to partake of the Passover meal in commemoration of God's deliverance out of Egyptian slavery. "*The stranger that dwells with you*"⁶⁶ is considered to be a "resident alien" or "foreigner". Here again is a witness of God's missional grace extended to other people groups that are willing to honor his Word in obeying his requirements of becoming his covenant people in the earth. While moving his people toward the promise land, he is also extending his missional plan among other people groups in the world. Kaiser believes it was not an outlandish idea to think that the Lord was simultaneously extending the offer of salvation to others during the Old Testament era in addition to Israel.⁶⁷ He views the prayer in which Solomon prayed in the dedication of the temple as a witness also of God extending his missional call beyond the Hebrew people.

Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, but has come from a far country for your name's sake (for they will hear of your great name and your strong hand and your outstretched, arm), and when he comes and prays toward this temple, "hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, that all peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by your name."⁶⁸

According to Solomon's prayer, God's missional voice and ears would be open to Foreigners and Gentiles. As they came to worship the God of Israel and make request of Him, His response to their prayers would cause them to believe the testimonies the Hebrews told of their God and they in turn would know that he is a God with power and their witness would cause God's name to be known great in the earth.

66. Exodus 12:48 (New International Version).

67. Kaiser, "Great Commission."

68. 1 Kings 8:41-43 (New International Version).

According to Martin-Achard, the book of Exodus ends with God coming to dwell among his people (Ex. 25-40).⁶⁹ Martin-Achard reminds us that mission is a matter of presence. That is, the true essence of mission is the presence of the people of God in the midst of mankind and the presence of God in the midst of his people.⁷⁰

Kaiser states: “It is clear that God’s mission was not exclusively Jewish in the Old Testament. While Israel remains at the center of the story, this is not to say that there was not globalization of the gospel in view.”⁷¹

God’s missional theme is visible throughout the Old Testament. Not only do we witness God’s missional plan in the Pentateuch, but also the prophets themselves were witnesses to the missional call of God among all families in the earth.

Wiersbe interprets Isaiah 42:1-9 as an introduction to Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:18-20) as we see his first coming in humility and grace, and his second coming in power and judgment.⁷² He believes that between these two events we have the present age of the church. Isaiah 42:1, 6 provides a missional concept of God working in the midst of the periods of Israel’s disobedience, trials and restorations in fulfilling his missional call in the earth.

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles.”⁷³

69. Robert Martin-Achard. “A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel’s Mission to the World. Oliver and Boyd, 1962, 79.

70. Martin-Achard, “Light to the Nations.”

71. Kaiser, “Great Commission.”

72. Wiersbe, Warren W. *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the Old Testament*. David C Cook, 1993.

73. Isaiah 42:1, 6

possibly be merely a personified collective.⁷⁴ Further, Keil et.al. contend the prophet himself cannot be intended; for what is here affirmed of this servant of Jehovah goes infinitely beyond anything to which a prophet was ever called, or of which a man was ever capable. It must therefore be the future Christ.⁷⁵

As God extends his loving mercy to Israel as they continually turned from his truth to go after the gods of the heathen nations, and reap the consequences of captivity to those nations, God yet visited them with words of hope and restoration. This restoration was not only centered on the Israelites but God's fulfillment of his missional promise and plan to extend his plan of salvation unto the Gentiles.

Carver suggested that the visions in the new heavens and new earth in the second part of promises and prophecies by the prophet Isaiah, concerning the servant Jehovah, are at every turn made to include all who shall learn faith among all peoples, and they shall be very many.⁷⁶ The following scriptures are examples of such teaching:

Isaiah 44:24-45; 25 presents all phases of Divine contact, general and particular are affirmed and the end, salvation offered to all, distinctly set forth. In Isaiah 60:1-4, Zion is called to “Arise, Shine” upon the darkness of the nations who will come to her light, and a glorious vision is presented of the multitudes coming from all the ends of the earth, and again Isaiah 66:18-24, where we read that God takes knowledge of men’s works and thoughts. He will gather all nations and tongues to witness His glory and will set among them a sign; that such as are saved will be sent to declare God’s glory among the nations that have not yet heard his fame nor seen His

74. Friedrich and Delitzsch, “Commentary.”

75. Friedrich and Delitzsch, “Commentary.”

76. William Owen Carver. “Missions in the Plan of the Ages: Bible Studies in Missions.” Revell, 1909.

glory, and that when these missionaries bring their “brethren out of all nations” “of them also will I take for priests and for Levites, saith Jehovah.”⁷⁷

Kaiser suggests that there is a most significant missiological text.⁷⁸ He states it was there that God promised that the fallen “house” of David that had become only a “booth” or “tent” would be repaired and restored “in that day” of God’s work in the end times.⁷⁹ This work of restoration, Kaiser believes would be “so that they may possess the remnant of Edom, even all the nations that bear my name.”⁸⁰

“In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent, I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be,” so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,” declares the LORD, who will do the things.⁸¹

In his opinion, the future of Israel once again would involve a wide nationalism. That is the point that James brought out to end the dispute at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13-18) as he employed this very passage to end the doubts of many about Gentiles being offered the same free grace of God as the Jewish believers were experiencing.⁸²

Smith and Page view Amos’ position on “declares the LORD,” as a prophetic use of what they call an oracle formula of the assurance that the promised restoration would occur and that the Gentiles would be included in the people of God.⁸³

77. Isaiah 66:18-24 (New International Version).

78. Kaiser, “Great Commission.”

79. Kaiser, “Great Commission.”

80. Kaiser, “Great Commission.”

81. Amos 9:11-12 (New International Version).

82. Kaiser, “Great Commission.”

83. Gary V. Smith and Franklin S. Page. "The New American Commentary." *Nashville: Broadman & Holman* (1995).

The verse is interpreted as if the Lord is fulfilling the prophecy of Amos⁸⁴

J. E. Smith, suggests the promise made by Yahweh to “raise up his ruin,” uses a singular suffix and refers to David, under whom the destroyed kingdom would rise to new power and prestige.⁸⁵ Smith explains the “promise” would be extended and Yahweh would construct the house of David as in traditional times or the glorious days of David and Solomon when the Davidic kingdom was the leading kingdom of the Near East.⁸⁶ He who would be the fulfillment of these promises went even beyond Amos when he declared that “a greater than Solomon is here.”⁸⁷

Smith sees the remnant of Edom in this promise as a specific example of a general principle. This restored Davidic kingdom represents the Church of Christ that would take possession of “all the nations.”⁸⁸ Smith states,

Those who hear the Word of the Lord and who, by faith, are incorporated into the true Israel of God is what this is making reference to according to Smith. This this messianic kingdom would become the means of reaching the nations of the world with the claims of Messiah. He believes, “Amos is declaring that a day would come when the people of God would be reconstituted under a Davidic king. Gentiles would be very much a part of that kingdom. Through the Gospel they become fellow heirs and partakers of the promise. At the Jerusalem conference this text was cited to furnish Scriptural justification for Gentile evangelism” (Acts 15:16f.)⁸⁹

84. Smith and Page, “New American.”

85. Smith, “The *Pentateuch*.”

86. Smith, “The *Pentateuch*.”

87. Smith, “The *Pentateuch*.”

88. Smith, “The *Pentateuch*.”

89. Smith, “The *Pentateuch*.”

Smith further suggests that the opening word of Amos 9:12 should be noted.⁹⁰ The word “for” (lema’an) suggest the purpose for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom under Messiah, ‘viz., that Gentiles might be included within the family of God. Thus world evangelism was part of God’s plan from the very beginning.⁹¹

Wright concludes,

“The prophets were thus aware of two complementary truths, on the one hand, whatever Yahweh did among the nations was ultimately for the benefit of Israel, his covenant people. Yet on the other hand, what Yahweh did for Israel was ultimately for the benefit of the nations. This double reality is significant for it preserves the universality of God’s sovereignty over all nations, while recognizing the particularity of his unique relationship with Israel. God’s providential reign over the nations is related to his redemptive purposes for his people, but his redemptive work among his people is related to his missionary purpose among the nations. The two cannot be separated.”⁹²

Carver’s view of missions is that of an agency through which the people that walk in darkness come to see the Great Light and by which the light shines upon them that are dwelling in the land of deep darkness.⁹³ To him, the virgin birth of Christ was discerned by Mary, his mother, as God fulfilling his word of “mercy” towards Abraham and his seed “forever,” - a word that was meant to include blessings for all mankind.⁹⁴

Carver suggested, “In the teaching of Jesus, both in its general terms and principles and in specific precept, He laid the foundation for, and enjoined upon all His followers, universal missionary work.”⁹⁵ He believes “Jesus has ever in mind the needs of man when He interprets

90. Smith, “*The Pentateuch.*”

91. Smith, “*The Pentateuch*

92. Wright, “*Knowing the Holy Spirit.*”

93. Owen, “*Missions.*”

94. Owen, “*Missions.*”

95. Owen, “*Missions.*”

the Law, the traditions, the obligation of the Sabbath, His own message, and His death that will draw all men unto Him.⁹⁶ Carver continues, “It is in this effort of His followers to interpret their master’s mind that we have the four Gospels which set forth the universal Gospel distinctly conceived to be aggressively designed for all humanity.”⁹⁷

Guder believes the New Testament Gospels are more “missional” than we often realize.⁹⁸ Guder states, “The Gospels written to the mission of God by telling the story of Jesus that is at the very heart of that mission. Beyond that, they serve as instruments of God’s mission in the world. They do this by encouraging and equipping communities of believers to participate in the mission of God.”⁹⁹

In *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*, Flemming states, “The tension in Jesus’ mission statements in Matthew is well-known.”¹⁰⁰ He believes on the one hand, Jesus instructs the Twelve to “Go no-where among Gentiles . . . but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:5-6, cf. 10:23; 14:21-28). On the one hand, the Gospel concludes with Jesus commissioning his followers to go and “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19-20; cf. 24:14). And in response to a Roman Centurion’s faith that is like “no one in Israel,” Jesus prophesies that many Gentiles will enter the kingdom of heaven,” while the heirs of the kingdom (the Jews) “will be thrown into outer darkness” (Mt 8:10-12; cf. 21:43). Mathew in fact, prepares for the Gentile mission from the beginning – whether by naming Gentile women in Jesus’ family line (Mt 1:5-6), by telling the story of the visit of Persian Magi at Jesus’ birth

96. Owen, “*Missions*.”

97. Owen, “*Missions*.”

98. Daniel L. Guder and Lois Barrett. “*Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998, 133.

99. Dean Flemming. “*Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. InterVarsity Press, 2009, 248.

100. Flemming. “*Contextualization*.”

(Mt 2:1-12), or by citing scriptural prophecies that include Gentiles in the Messiah's mission (Mt 4:15; 12:18-21).¹⁰¹

Carver interprets Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations as a means of looking to the revealing of His Father to all men.¹⁰² He believes that Jesus uses mission to make His Father known to the world.¹⁰³ He believes in (Matt. 19:28; Lk. 18:29; 24:48 and Acts 1:8) that "Lo, I am with you all the days even unto the end of the world," as the most familiar and most cherished of all the forms of this promise.¹⁰⁴ He suggests it is impossible to legitimately dissociate the promise from the command universally and fully to evangelize the nations. He further suggests that it is only when engaged in this task that we may claim or realize this promise.¹⁰⁵

In Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling, Flemming states, "Both in his teaching and his actions, Jesus gathers at the table a mixed company of sinners, tax collectors, the poor and the disabled (Mt 9:10-12; Lk 14:12-14, 21-24).¹⁰⁶ His close association with such people gains him a reputation as a 'friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34). And that was no compliment! In the process, he makes a powerful statement about who is a part of the new people of God and who will have a place at the Messiah's banquet in the future (Mt 8:11)."¹⁰⁷

101. Carver, "*Missions.*"

102. Carver, "*Missions.*"

103. Carver, "*Missions.*"

104. Carver, "*Missions.*"

105. Flemming, "*Recovering.*"

106. Flemming, "*Recovering.*"

107. Carver, "*Missions.*"

The Book of Acts in Carver's view is an inspired account of first experiences in executing the commission under the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁸ The work that Jesus began to do in His personal ministry, Carver believes is continued through His disciples under the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).¹⁰⁹ Fleming views Acts as a Book that is intended to be more than simply a description of the gospel's progress between Jerusalem and Rome. In his opinion, it as an invitation that beckons its readers to embrace God's saving purpose for the world.¹¹⁰ He states: "In short, Luke tells the story in such a way that it could build up and fortify the largely Gentile church of his day (including Theophilus), helping it to understand who it is, where it stands in God's plan for the ages and what it must do to fulfill its calling as a missionary community."¹¹¹

In *The Acts of the Apostles*, Marshall believes the Book of Acts primarily seek to build up an increasingly Gentile Christian community by showing them through the story of God's working in the past what it means to be the church and how they are to live in light of that attern.¹¹⁰ Fleming suggests that part of Luke's reason for writing Acts was not only to encourage Theophilus and other Gentile Christians to participate in God's universal mission but to also provide them a programmatic example of the Church's Spirit with an empowered witness to various groups of people.¹¹²

Thomas states, "Here (Acts 10:34-35), Peter begins with a confession about God as one who does not show favoritism or 'partiality' (Acts 10:34 NRSV; *prosopolempetes*). Although this

108. Carver, "Missions."

109. Carver, "Missions."

110. Carver, "Missions."

111. I. Howard Marshall. "The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary. Vol. 5." Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980, 33.

112. Dean Fleming. "Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling." InterVarsity Press, 2013.

specific term appears only here in the NT, a related noun from (prosopolempsia) describes God similarly (Rom 2:11). Thus, God's impartiality has to do with God's favorable response toward both Jews and Gentile who worship God. This is in stark contrast to Peter's earlier defiant response to the heavenly voice (Acts 10:14-16). The conjunction but (alla) suggests that God's favor is not limited to a particular people (Jews) but extends to persons in every nation (Gentiles) (35)."¹¹³

In Michael J. Gorman's view Jesus' death on the cross reveals a missional God.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the church, saved and shaped by the cross will be a missional people. He also suggests that Jesus' prayer before he died on the cross, was for his disciples to remain in unity with himself and the Father as well as one another, was so that their witness to the Father's saving mission enacted in the life and death of the Son would be received as such, by the world (John 17:20-23).¹¹⁵

In *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Beker states: "The church is not self-preservation for eternal life but service to the created world in the sure hope of the world's transformation at the time of God's final triumph.¹¹⁶ Otherwise, the church's sighing for the redemption of the world (Rom. 8:19-21) is simply reduced to a faint ecclesial whisper."¹¹⁷ (Zehr, Paul M. 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 2010) Beker shares: "God desires everyone

113. Richard R. Thompson. "NBBC, Acts: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition." The Foundry Publish, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2015, 35.

114. Michael J. Gorman., "Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross." Wm. B. Eerdmansn Publishing, 2001

115. Gorman, "Cruciformity."

116. Johan Christiaan Beker. "Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought." Fortress Press, 1994, 313, 327.

117. Beker, "Paul the Apostle."

to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Salvation for all rest upon the foundation of the oneness of God in both Old Testament and New Testament (Exod 20:1-3; Duet. 6:4); 1 Tim. 2:5a). The oneness of God means that God is God both of the Jews and Gentiles and provides one salvation for both Rom. 3:30). He believes no distinction can be made between Jew and Gentile because “the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him (Rom. 10:12). The prophet Malachi asks, “Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?” (Mal. 2:10; cf. Acts 17:26-27). Anything less than one God and one salvation leaves the world in a state of religious confusion, with a truncated gospel and the gospel reduced to a racial, ethnic, and tribal religions.¹¹⁸

Fleming concludes that this God is a missional God, one who actively calls and chooses people to bring them into relationship with himself and into the coming kingdom of God (I Thess. 1:4; 2:12; 4:7; 5:24).¹¹⁹ He suggests, for Paul God’s work of calling and forming a people is not over but is continuing; it is God’s desire to transfer yet more people out of the realm of the perishing and into the realm of those being saved.¹²⁰

Application

The Bible reveals a God who has created mankind in his image and his likeness. Sin enters the scene of the world stage of life and God responds by revealing himself as a missional God who seeks to share his saving grace and glory with all mankind in the earth. This insight inspires me to reexamine my personal attitude and actions in representing a missional God to the world. I will personally seek ways to engage more purposefully in the communities and even beyond

118. Beker, “Paul the Apostle.”

119. Flemming, “*Recovering.*”

120. Flemming, “*Recovering.*”

to pray and seek ways of advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ to others. I will diligently continue to seek out ways to learn more about various cultures and people groups in order to more effectively serve their spiritual as well as felt needs. I truly believe that mission is not merely a task to be assigned to a chosen few. Rather, mission is a task for the whole church, since the church, as the body of Christ in the world, represents to the world what Christ is.

In my role as senior pastor, I will seek strategies to empower my leadership team to develop a strategic plan of action to cultivate a culture within our church that allows us to move beyond missional plans set by the church. The goal of the plan will lead us outside of the church into the neighborhoods, communities and beyond in order to find what their needs are and what God is speaking to us relative to his missional agenda for those outside the walls of the church. As the twentieth-century theologian Emil Brunner put it, “The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission there is no church.”

Conclusion

Throughout the thread of Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation we find a missional God who seeks to redeem all people groups back in relationship with him. The Old Testament Pentateuch as well as the voice of the Prophets reveals the heart and mind of God reaching beyond the boundaries of one particular people group, the Jews, to all the people groups of the world. In Christopher J. H. Wright’s *The Mission of God; Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, suggests, whereas a traditional interpretation of the *Missio Dei* revolves around “sending” – the Father sends the Son, and together they send both the Spirit and the Church.¹²¹ Wright speaks of God’s mission in terms of God’s long-term purpose to restore people from all nations and the whole creation.¹²²

121. Wright, “*Mission of God.*”

122. Wright, “*Mission of God.*”

The gospel as well as the teachings of Paul reveals a missional God who has and is working through the vehicle of his Church. Gorman asked the question: What is God up to in the world? What is the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God? In his view, Paul's answer to this question would be clear: to bring salvation to the world. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jews first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). He believes that means of that salvation is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's Son, Israel's Messiah, and the world's true Lord. This is the gospel, the good news. Gorman states,

God is therefore at work creating a multi-cultural, socio-economically diverse communities ("churches") that participate in this liberating transformative reality now, even if incompletely and imperfectly: "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).¹²³

123. Gorman, "*Cruciformity*."

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the scholarly work and to discover how others have addressed the subject of missional imagination through spiritual formation within the context of the local church. The literature will examine:

- An Overview of the Missional Imagination Movement
- How leaders affect the development of a missional imagination within the local church.
- The effect of programs and church structure in developing a missional imagination within the local church.
- The biblical instructions on engaging the church within the world.
- The importance of cultural understanding and respect in taking the gospel message outside the walls of the church.
- How to effectively mobilize the church into neighborhoods and communities with a commitment to relationship building and reflecting God's love among the unsaved.
- The effect size has on the church when it comes to its missional imagination.

An Overview of the Missional Imagination Movement

Alan Roxburg helps us to understand the tremendous and lasting impact of missional imagination both in the scholarly literature and in practical use in churches over the world. Since the dramatic introduction of the term *missional* or *missional imagination*, for over a decade, the with the publication of Missional Church in 1998.¹

1. Roxburgh, "Missional."

In Christianity, missional living is regarded as the embracing of the attitude, thinking, behaviors, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message. The missional church movement, a church renewal movement predicated on the necessity of missional living by Christians, gained popularity at the end of the twentieth century due to advocates like Tim Keller and others in the Gospel and Our Culture Network. Advocates contrast missional living with the concept of a select group of professional missionaries, emphasizing that all Christians should be involved in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

The missional living concept is rooted in the *Missio dei* (Latin, "the sending of God").² In 1934, Karl Hartenstein, a German missiologist, coined the phrase in response to Karl Barth and his emphasis on *actio Dei* ("the action of God").³ In their view, missional activities stem from God; whereby, the triune God is the primary acting agent in the world and within the church.⁴

According to Lesslie Newbigin and Jesus' statements in the Gospel according to John, every Christian has been sent by Jesus with the gospel together in community to those in the surrounding culture for the sake of the King and His kingdom: "The Church is sent into the world to continue that which he came to do, in the power of the same Spirit, reconciling people to God." Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you." (John 20:21)⁵

Newbigin explains that Christians are not at liberty to proclaim that since they were not called to be a missionary that they do not have to evangelize friends and neighbors. Rather, there is no difference, in spiritual terms, between a missionary witnessing in his or her hometown and

2. Lesslie Newbigin, "The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission." Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995. Quotations from a single source within a paragraph are indicated by a single footnote.

3. Newbigin, "Open Secret."

4. Newbigin, "Open Secret."

5. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

a missionary witnessing in any part of the world. Thus, we are all called to go, rather near or far, even if it only within our local communities.⁶ Missional living is the embodiment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world by incarnating the gospel.

Missional now appears increasingly as church themes, workshop monikers, religious campus foci, as well as, in book titles, blogs, and academic and scholarly literature.⁷ This transformative word, *missional* represents an altered perspective of the church and its current state, to an understanding of a church that understands and acts upon the calling for a clear and often novel realization of the church's identity in not as its own entity operating through its voted upon or establish mission, but rather the proclaimed mission of God.

The Effect of Leaders on Persons and Organizations

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was informed by his disciples (Matt 15:12) that the Pharisees were offended when he quoted the prophecy of Isaiah:

“These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” (Matt 15:8-9)⁸

Jesus then told his disciples, “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch” (Matt 15:14).⁹ Jesus' words show the impact that leaders have on the direction of a person or an organization. In *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation*, Craig Van Gelder writes, “Significant changes are taking place in

6. Newbigin, “Open Secret.”

7. Roxburgh, “Missional.”

8. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

9. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

theological education today regarding the formation of church leaders.” He suggests the nature of this change is complex, but in simple terms it means that new insights from an emerging missional theology interact within an expanding system of congregations to redefine the purpose, the method, and, to some extent, the location of theological education.¹⁰

Aubrey Malphurs, in *Developing a Dynamic Mission for Your Ministry*, sees everything changing at such a speed that holding unto a compelling sense of direction for one’s ministry is not always easy. He sees these times of unprecedented change as times of great challenges and opportunity as well as danger for the ministry. Although many churches believe that all change is bad, Malphurs believes nothing could be further from the truth. Some changes are good for a ministry and others are bad; some will help one’s church while others can hurt it. The key to success are the choices an institution and its leaders make.¹¹

Van Gelder wonders if seminaries and schools of theology will rise to the opportunity that is now before them. He suggests this remains to be seen, but clearly there is an opportunity for these institutions to explore common ground regarding missional theology and therefore to engage in the process of redefining theological education for the purpose of missional leadership formation. He sees the days ahead as being full of possibilities.

Alan J. Roxburgh sees this change element among the church as well; he uses the term “a language house” as a reflection of how one sees the world or reads a text. He suggests, “The majority of our leaders still remain firmly locked into the language houses of tending to and shaping everything in terms of the church and its success. That is what they have seen and how they have been trained in seminaries and Bible schools.” However, Roxburgh believes that “the

10. Gelder, “Missional Church.”

11. Aubrey Malphurs, “Developing a Dynamic Mission for Your Ministry: Finding Direction and Making an Impact as a Church Leader, 2nd ed.” (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 21.

real challenge we face is how to transform the imagination of our leaders for them to see it's not about getting their churches filled; it's about joining with what God is doing in the world.”¹² He continues,

If we are to hear what God might be doing in the massively shifting contexts in which we live, we must move beyond conversations about the church, about how to make it work, and about patterns for success. At this point in our history, we need to be asking radically different questions: What is God up to in the neighborhoods and communities? How do we join with what God is doing in these places? He sees church questions as a subset of these far more important questions.¹³

Being able to bring the important questions to the forefront is noted by Van Gelder as it pertains to leading the church to where God is at work in the world. He suggests, “The missional church conversation seeks to web two theological disciplines—missiology and ecclesiology—in order to truly understand God. Missiology is more than a discipline of strategies and methods for evangelizing the world; missiology is a theological discipline that discerns how the triune God is at work in the world and how the church might participate.”¹⁴

Both Van Gelder and Roxburgh see the church in a transforming state as it pertains to its missional imagination, and it is through this sense of formation that the church must be willing to yield in order to move beyond planning for programs within the church and instead focusing on how the church can be more visible and purposeful in neighborhoods and in the world.

The Sending Nature of God and Change in the Church

The word *institution* has often been used to identify the church. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch see this identity as having a negative effect that does not allow the church to see itself

12. Roxburgh, “Missional.”

13. Roxburgh, “Missional.”

14. Gelder, “Missional Church.”

from a missional viewpoint: “Church leaders as well as Christians in general have regarded the church as an institution to which outsiders must come in order to receive a certain product, namely, the gospel and all its associated benefits.” In their view, the church should be missional rather than institutional. The church should define itself in terms of its mission—to take the gospel to and incarnate the gospel within a specific cultural context. They add, “By definition, the missional church is always outward looking, always changing (as culture continues to change), and always faithful to the Word of God. Above all, we’re convinced that what will ultimately be required is Christian leadership that values imagination, creativity, innovation, and daring.”¹⁵

The apostle Paul also speaks of this ever-changing aspect of believers: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). The apostle suggests this experience of change will be continual and ongoing, even after death (1 Cor 15:50-58),¹⁶ as he encourages the church to continue carrying out the mission of God:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. . . . But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:51-52, 57-58)¹⁷

In having this assurance of being changed by God, not only in life but even in death, Paul encourages believers to be faithful to God’s mission in the earth. This concept of mission being

15. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. “The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovations and Mission for the Twenty-First-Century Church.” (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), xi, 7.

16. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

17. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible

viewed as the work of God is also held by Frost and Hirsch, as they too believe that “mission is not merely an activity of the church. It is the very heartbeat and work of God.” To them, “God is a sending God, with a desire to see humankind and creation reconciled, redeemed, and healed. The missional church, then, is a sent church. It is a going church, a movement of God through his people, sent to bring healing to a broken world.”¹⁸

The sending nature of God is communicated in the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament. Moses is sent by God to bring his chosen people out of Egypt so they will inherit a land which God had promised them. Moses was willing to accept the call as well as the suffering that accompanied it as he sought to carry out God’s mission for the people of Israel. The writer of Hebrews gives insight into what was in Moses’ mind and heart:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (Heb 11:24-27)

Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah witnessed God’s sending nature in an experience the prophet had early in life:

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
Before you were born I sanctified you;
I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

Then said I:

“Ah, Lord GOD!
Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.”

18. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

But the LORD said to me:

“Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’
For you shall go to all to whom I send you,
And whatever I command you, you shall speak.

Do not be afraid of their faces,
for I am with you to deliver you,” says the LORD.

Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me

“Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.
See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms,
To root out and to pull down,
To destroy and to throw down,
To build and to plant.” (Jer 1:4-10)¹⁹

Nor is the New Testament silent on this matter. Jesus individually selected his twelve disciples and informed them that they were to follow him and he would make them fishers of people. He then added more disciples, and Luke records the sending nature of God:

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’ But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.” (Luke 10:1-12)

19. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

As Scripture suggests, there are a great many ways to witness God as a sending God in developing a missional imagination among leaders, as well as laity. Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren write,

The life of the church must be changed through renewed dialogue with Scripture and by letting Scripture speak to us through a serious dialogue with the cultural context. This is a process we call “engaging the context,” in which the people of the congregation recognized the changing character of life and the need to reenter the particularity of their neighborhoods and communities so that the gospel can become alive in that situation.²⁰

They believe this is what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, when he said:

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partake of it with you. (1 Cor 9:20-23)

Roxburgh and Boren believe that it is through dialogue and engagement with the contexts and neighborhoods in which believers live that a missional strategy is shaped.²¹ The best way to do this, they write, is by entering the neighborhood and spending time with people, joining community organizations, connecting with people across the street or at the coffee shop, and taking walks and initiating conversations—doing a thousand little human things that make life rich. It is essential to be in a setting long enough to be known and to absorb its ethos in order to become part of the life of the context, not just an observer. To them, we as believers are then learning to read Scripture with the eyes of our neighborhood, which shapes our imagination about the mission of God and allows us to begin seeing Scripture in a new way. Missional life

20. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

21. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

emerges from these kinds of engagement rather than from trying to sell church growth programs.²²

There is an apostolic leadership concept of which Frost and Hirsch speak that will cause the fivefold ministry gifts (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher [Eph 4:11]) to be seen as being a vital part of the leadership necessary for the missional church, as well as the maturing of believers. In their opinion, “Without apostolic leadership the missional church is unlikely to rise at all, and if it does manage to survive birth, it will not last long because it will lack the leadership structure to sustain it over the long distance.”²³

Missional Transformation

Frost, Hirsch, Roxburgh, Van Gelder, and Scripture speak about an outsider’s view of the mission of the church. Leaders are vital in causing a missional imagination to be a part of the culture of the church. Scripture, along with the authors named, encourage a concept of the church as an entity that trains and sends. However, Frost and Hirsch speak of a paradigm shift that is taking place in the church. They raise the question, “What can a leader do to promote paradigm shift?” and suggest the following:

- Encourage Holy Dissatisfaction—To provide a basic discontent with what is and so awaken a desire to move toward what could be.
- Embrace Subversive Questioning—Questions are subversive because they force the hearer to self-awareness and a personal search for answers.
- Become a Beginner—Learn to think like a beginner, not like an expert. Try to think how you would do something if you were doing it for the first time.

22. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

23. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

- Take More Risks—Risk-taking as a stimulus for creative reimaging is commended. If you want to help birth and nurture a truly missional-apostolic church, then put both yourself and your organization at risk because without it you will be neither missional or apostolic.
- Create a Climate of Change—Develop a certain ecology where creativity can thrive.²⁴

The top-down model of leadership is not viewed as a healthy way to mobilize the church, as Roxburgh and Boren state. In their opinion, “If missional transformation is introduced as a program of plan from the leadership (a top-down model), it will go through this predictable cycle of energy, enthusiasm, and decline because it was never actually owned by the people themselves.”²⁵ They believe the key to missional innovation is empowering the people of a local church to discern and develop actions that come from among themselves rather than from strategies and programs proposed by leaders. Most plans for change and programs initiated by leaders will not change the social system or the imagination of the people. Leaders have a choice: either they can be in control of plans, programs, and outcomes or they can work at creating the environment that will release the missional imagination that is among the people of God. Just because leaders have a good idea, a great plan, or a brilliant strategy for creating the best missional church in the world, that does not mean people will accept and incorporate it into their lives.²⁶

24. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

25. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

26. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

Frost and Hirsch also see certain models as negative approaches to creating a missional imagination. They see the overly reproduced Christendom-mode church as having its core with a number of fundamental flaws which can be categorized generally into three broad areas:

- Attractional—This model of the traditional church plants itself with a particular community, neighborhood, or locale and expects that people will come to it to meet God and find fellowship with others.²⁷
- Dualistic—This model of the traditional church separates the sacred from the profane, the holy from the unholy, the in from the out. This dualism has over 1,700 years created Christians who cannot relate their interior faith to their exterior practice, and this affects their ethics, their lifestyles, and their capacity to share their faith meaningfully with others.²⁸
- Hierarchical—This model of the traditional church is deeply embedded in an overly religious, bureaucratic, top-down model of leadership, as opposed to one that is more structured around grassroots agendas.²⁹

Frost and Hirsch believe the future shape of the church will place a high value on communal life, more open leadership structures, and the contribution of all the people of God. It will be radical in its attempts to embrace biblical mandates for the life of locally based faith communities without feeling as though it has to reconstruct the first-century church in every detail.³⁰

27. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

28. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

29. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

30. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

Internal Structure and Organization for Effective Missional Activity

In *Reframing Organizations*, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal claim that “reorganizing or restructuring is a powerful but high-risk approach to improvement. An organization’s structure at any moment represents its resolution of an enduring set of basic tensions or dilemmas.” They continue, “At a given moment, an organization’s structure represents its best effort to align internal workings with outside concerns.”³¹

The infrastructure of a local church often needs to be adjusted in order for the church to exercise in effective missional activity outside its walls. No church should assume a posture of seeing itself as being unable to become missional. Roxburgh and Boren ask, “Can My Church Be Missional?” They answer, “Across multiple church systems the missional conversation has taken on a life of its own. As a result, people access resources and ideas from one another, often crossing traditional lines of denominations or affiliations. This kind of boundary crossing means that the missional conversation, in all its current forms, can enter practically any kind of church right now.” They also believe “the missional journey calls us out onto a new kind of river that none of us know how to navigate, because it challenges the core of our church imaginations.”³²

To Roxburgh and Boren, “the missional conversation has entered almost every stream of the church. The Spirit of God is moving in the church in creative, generative ways that call the people of God to engage their neighborhoods and display God’s kingdom in everyday life.” Further, “The missional journal begins where people are, not from some vision for where we would like them to be. In order to begin where we are, we have to take the time to attend to and listen to the narratives and stories of our churches and our people.”³³

31. Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, “Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership.” 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 73, 97.

32. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

33. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

From this perspective, being missional now becomes an activity of every church and not a few. When local churches are willing to lay aside their nonessential differences and begin sharing in conversation as well as resources, the missional imagination can transform large or small churches with an infrastructure that purposefully expresses missional activity in neighborhoods. This view of working together is held by Leonidas A. Johnson, who writes,

When it comes to fulfilling God's mission to unreached people groups it makes no sense to duplicate efforts and fumble over one another in trying to accomplish the tasks he has given us. Let us learn from past mission experiences and history this means we must coordinate efforts and work together!“³⁴

Moreover, “Jesus established the church as an instrument to complete God's mission. Mission is not a part of the church; rather, the church is a part of God's mission,” according to Johnson.³⁵

Many of the present programs in local churches can become instruments for missional activity by being restructured to take on an outward rather than an inward focus. In *Mission*, Anthony Pappas and Scott Planting write, “For mission to be done programmatically, at least four functions must be accomplished by the missioner: a goal must be set; a plan must be adopted; resources must be marshalled and allocated; and measurements must be taken. These four procedures assure that the programmatic approach is a very productive way of operating.”³⁶ They suggest a six-step process to help a church identify and organize its unique community ministry:

1. Understand Your Community Needs
2. Understand Your Congregation's Story

34. Johnson, “The African American Church.”

35. Johnson, “The African American Church.”

36. Anthony Pappas and Scott Planting, “Mission: The Small Church Reaches Out, Small Church in Action.” (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1993), 43.

3. Define the Need Your Congregation Can Meet
4. Identify the Leadership to Make Your Ministry Go
5. Develop a Vision to Inspire
6. Build Cooperation That Leads to Lasting Results

Pappas and Scott admonish that the six steps do not represent a strict order to be followed but require individual attention in order to establish a successful ministry.³⁷

An emphasis on programs and organization fits with the view of Malphurs, who says, “A dynamic strategy accomplishes your ministry mission. While you may have the most profound mission the world has ever witnessed, without a strategy—a way to implement that mission—then you are wasting your time and that of others who emotionally and intellectually own your mission.” He believes,

a good strategy facilitates understanding. . . It is at the strategy level that various programs work together to produce godly disciples. A well-developed strategy ties all the programs together and communicates the spiritual purposes of each. First comes the strategy; then programs are developed around that strategy. Each program is designed to accomplish some phase of the strategy. When a program ceases to accomplish anything, it must be replaced by one that does.³⁸

Congregational perception plays a crucial role in the formation and implementation of various strategies and programs that develop a missional imagination within a local church. Van Gelder notes that “the structure and patterns of church both inform and are informed by our particular views of church, ministry, leadership, and the world. Structures and patterns are certainly needed, but they can become limiting and restrictive at times.” Moreover, he suggests,

A view of God that is missional declares that God is a missionary God inviting all people into communion with God’s self and sending God’s people into the world to share God’s

37. Pappas and Planting, “Mission.”

38. Malphurs, “Dynamic Mission.”

transforming message. In his view, “‘missional’ describes both God and the church’s very nature.³⁹

In addressing the matter of perspective, we as pastors will miss God’s bigger picture if we limit this missional perspective to human ability alone. God is very much involved through his Word and his Spirit, providing the church a perspective that extends beyond human ability alone. In *The Missional Church Perspective*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile write, “Missional imagination as fundamentally about seeing the church and the world in light of the triune God’s presence and activity. Jesus repeatedly stresses new ways of seeing in his encounters with various people in the Gospels. Discerning the presence and possibility of the reign of God in our midst involves a fresh presence illuminated by the Spirit.”⁴⁰

Structure, organization, and programs are common threads of most churches. These internal structures can be adjusted wisely to ensure the missional imagination of the church is continually being developed and activated in the community. Leaders and laity can develop the necessary training and skills to ensure that programs are not limited to meeting the needs of the members but extend outside the walls of the church. God has promised his presence, his Word, and his Spirit to help each believer to minister to the needs of the world.

God’s Love Creating Unity Through Diversity

Mission is often ineffective when Christians view people as objects to increase church size or numbers and not as creatures deserving to experience the love of God through those who are recipients of his love. This love is revealed by God despite humankind’s sinful nature. The

39. Van Gelder, “Missional Church.”

40. Van Gelder and Zscheile, “Missional Church Perspective.”.

apostle Paul communicates concerning God's love,

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given us . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."⁴¹

As the church moves beyond its walls and into the neighborhood, church members must be prepared to respond to the variety of needs and diversity that is present. The local needs of the neighborhood are significant, as Pappas and Planting recognize: "Mission opportunities flow out of the meeting of the unique story of your church with identified local needs." They then elaborate on their view:

We believe the local mission of your church takes place on four levels:

1. Presence (the way a congregation embodies and communicates the gospel to its community)
2. People (people to people and caring that makes us human and that Christianizes our social environment.
3. Pattern (living out a more healthy and righteous lifestyles)
4. Program (the specific ways we organize resources to meet needs)

We define mission as presence as the message of hope the church communicates to its community.⁴²

Johnson emphasizes cultural diversity as a way in which God accomplishes his missionary plan in the earth when he writes, "Different ethnic or people groups have different ways of communicating, different values systems, different ways of perceiving and

⁴¹ Romans 5:5,8 New King James Version .

42. Pappas and Planting, "Mission."

understanding the world. All these banners fall under the banner of culture. God works within different cultures to accomplish his missionary plan.” Johnson also focuses on the response of those hearing the gospel and relating it to their cultural practices: “Sometimes when people of different cultures hear the Gospel, they view certain practices as being hostile to their culture, making it impossible for them to follow Christ openly without abandoning their cultural identity and significant relationship.”⁴³

The church must awaken to the needs of the neighborhood and allow the Spirit of God to enlighten it as to how to express God’s love among its neighbors. Roxburgh and Boren suggest that a missional church does not focus on itself but on what God is doing in the neighborhood:

A missional imagination is not about the church; it’s not about how to make the church better, how to get more people to come to the church, or how to turn a dying church around. All these are good things, but they aren’t the focus of a missional imagination. The Spirit is calling the church on a journey outside of itself and its internal focus. This imagination turns most of our church practices on their head. It invites us to turn toward our neighborhoods and communities, listening first to what is happening among people and learning to ask different questions about what God is up to in the neighborhood. Rather than the primary question being, “How do we attract people to what we are doing?” it becomes, “What is God up to in this neighborhood?” and “What are the ways we need to change in order to engage the people in our community who no longer consider church a part of their lives?” This is what a missional imagination is about.⁴⁴

Cultural diversity is a common experience of all people groups. However, the church just not only embrace this fact but also see it as an opportunity to expand the gospel message beyond its comfort zone. Van Gelder and Zscheile point out,

Within the U.S. context, as in many societies, cultural and religious pluralism increasingly defines the twenty-first-century landscape. The neighbors in most U.S. communities (even many isolated rural communities) adhere to a plethora of faiths or no faith at all. They embody multiple cultural and religious perspectives and experiences. Missional engagement with people in a globalized world must take seriously the nuances of myriad subcultures and layers of difference, including between generations.⁴⁵

43. Johnson, “The African American Church.”

44. Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 20.

45. Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church Perspective*, 128.

Van Gelder and Zscheile also speak of the various ways culture is engaged in modern society. They offer,

It is no longer possible to speak of “U.S. culture” or “British culture” or “Ethiopian culture” in a monolithic manner. The church’s missionary relationship to culture must take seriously the complex, multiple, and overlapping cultural webs, networks, and streams in which people participate in any given locale. This calls for paying careful attention to traditional forms of cultural knowledge and identity and to the variety of contemporary media flows that shape people’s attitudes, perspectives, and imaginations. These flows are now often self-selective, ad hoc, and coproduced by participants, as exemplified by blogs or social networking sites like Facebook. People can choose to receive their news from sources whose worldview and assumptions they already share. A new kind of self-reinforcing cultural tribalism is emerging.⁴⁶

The incarnation of Jesus means that though he was fully God, yet he became man in order to redeem humankind and bring people back to harmony with God. The incarnation can be seen as an expression of God’s love in a fallen world. Frost places the incarnation in a missional contest and speaks of a spiritual geography of a neighborhood: “Incarnational mission means moving into the lives of those to whom we believe we’ve been sent. Living in one neighborhood, working in another, playing in another, and churching in yet another doesn’t model to people that Jesus is willing to move into their neighborhoods.” In Frost’s view,

This is all the more obvious when it comes to poorer or less desirable neighborhoods, where the residents already feel marginalized from mainstream society, only to have this feeling reinforced by the absence of Christian neighbors. Where there are churches in neighborhoods that have undergone cultural or economic changes in their makeup over the years, often the members of these churches live elsewhere. The church then just becomes an impersonal center for the delivery of Christian services, not a collective of incarnational neighbors.⁴⁷

Jesus’ example is seen through not only his incarnation but also his life and the message he proclaimed. This model and this message should be communicated from the church into the

46. Van Gelder and Zscheile, “*Missional Church Perspective*.”

47. Michael Frost, “The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church.” Shapevine (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 123.

neighborhood. The condition or culture of the people in the neighborhood should not cause the church to avoid living out its presence in the neighborhood. Frost notes,

To follow Jesus' incarnational example is to take seriously his message and his modeling that we are sent into a broken, unruly world, in which his reign is not fully understood nor acknowledged. We are sent as his agents of shalom in a world of anger and violence. He even commissioned his disciples to go out like lambs among wolves. He knows that the missional call involves a decision to participate in the unfurling of his kingdom of peace in the face of a broken world of anger and violence. This is clear in his teaching as well as in the example of his life.⁴⁸

God works in the midst of cultural norms and among all people groups. The church must not allow its experience and comfort zone to cause it to avoid engaging the neighborhood. The Spirit of God is aware of the conditions of the culture, as well as the hearts of the people. When believers trust God's model of Christ and his message, God will accomplish all that he purposed to do. Believers now become his agents of change among a people group that may have limited or no knowledge of God.

Resources and Missional Activity

In the Great Commission, Jesus sends the church into the world. He promises to be present in the church's missional activity. When the church uses limited resources to justify not going out into the world, it is avoiding its assignment from the Lord. Obedience is the essential motivation in exercising oneself in missional activity. Addressing this issue, Johnson writes,

Since the later eighteenth century, African Americans have displayed an interest in world evangelization. Some scholars have argued that this interest was due to escapism—a desire to leave the racist and hostile environment of America. Others have argued more positively that their involvement was motivated by a simple obedience to the Great Commission. While both factors were at work, obedience best explains the activity from the 1770's to the present day.⁴⁹

48. Frost, "Road to Missional."

49. Johnson, "The African American Church."

The writings of early African American missionaries make it clear that the desire to fulfill the Great Commission was the motivating factor for missionary service, “a God-given burden for the uttermost part,” according to Johnson.⁵⁰

The Great Commission should inspire a heart of obedience within the church as it seeks to identify the needs in its neighborhood and ways in which the church can respond. If limited resources are a factor, a church can then look for ways to join with others in addressing these needs. Pappas and Planting view the story of the feeding of the five thousand as a parable of small-church mission:

The needs of humanity are represented in the crowd hungry for lunch. We may be tempted to say, “But what is that among so many?” However, the Lord says to us, “Bring whatever you have to me.” The small church, like the young boy, must decide whether to consume the resources itself or offer them to the Lord. The resources of the small church often seem too trivial even to bother the Lord with, but when the small church responds

As the church with limited resources opens itself to others who perhaps have more resources and join their faith and commitment together with others serving in the neighborhood, then the potential of meeting needs outside of the church is strengthened. Pappas and Planting suggest, “What is unique about the role of a small church’s participation in community ministry is that it can’t do it alone. By its nature of limited resources and few people, small churches must

in faith and offers all of its resources, meager though they may seem, God does miraculous multiplication. The results are out of all proportion to the resources!⁵¹

form partnerships with other churches and organizations. At the heart of small-church community ministry is cooperation.” They believe this will produce much excitement within a local church:

What is exciting about local mission is that one opportunity leads to another. People in the church see what is happening and they get excited. The survival mentality—“how are

50. Johnson, “The African American Church.”

51. Pappas and Planting, “Mission.”

we going to pay bills this month?”—is replaced by the renewed sense of worth, of mission. Even more important, the community sees what is happening. That small church becomes the church that helps people, and people start to come.⁵²

Helping people in the neighborhood must be a priority within the church, but the present-day church seems to be more focused on programs and success than the needs of the neighborhood. Roxburgh claims, “Much of what is being offered today as ‘missional’ are tactics for making the church more successful or effective.” He suggests, “A radical way we can reform Christian life in our time is by the simple decision to reconnect with our neighborhoods, by asking what God is doing there.”⁵³

Johnson believes that African Americans have an important role to play in God’s missional imagination but that the church has misinterpreted Jesus’ command to start in Jerusalem and go from there, taking this command as proof that they are to start in their communities before branching out. Johnson says that instead “we must go where Jesus tells us to go” and places great responsibility on African American pastors:

African American pastors must decide which road to travel. The African American pastor, with socioeconomic parity in view, must choose whether to lead God’s flock to pursue the lifestyle of the rich and famous or to fall in line with the Good Shepherd and, like a faithful undershepherd, pursue God’s heart for the unreached peoples of the world. Let’s stop asking “How many you running?” and “How much you got?” “How many revivals you doing?” and “How much you getting paid?” Let’s ask, “How many local missionaries are you sending out?” and “How much are you putting in your mission budget?” . . . It is the calling of every Christian to use what God has given us, blessed us with, to be a blessing to others—to the glory of God. It is time for the African American church to play its unique and crucial role in God’s missionary plan, in God’s purpose to bless the nation.⁵⁴

Jesus demonstrated God’s love not only by attending to the spiritual needs of others but also by addressing their felt needs. The church should be faithful to the resources with which it

52. Pappas and Planting, “Mission.”

53. Roxburgh, “Missional.”

54. Johnson, “The African American Church.”

has been entrusted and ensure those resources are not being used just to provide programs for Christians but to have an effect in the world. The community needs a true witness of Jesus that extends beyond the preaching of the gospel to the Christ-like character of his children. When Frost and Hirsch speak of a missional-incarnational church, they say, “The missional-incarnational church has to demonstrate God’s love in humility, mercy, and concern for justice. In a sense, the incarnational church has to completely reframe the community’s perception about Jesus and the church.”⁵⁵

Vision and a Missional Focus

Van Gelder quotes Jesus: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come, repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15), and then writes, “Despite the fact that the reign of God was at hand when Jesus arrived on the scene, apparently it was not always easy to see. He had to announce it over and over. Many still saw only brief glimpses or missed it altogether. . . . It was vision in the present tense that Jesus was most concerned about in his ministry.” Therefore, “the impact for our work here is that our eschatology informs vision. . . . The tendency is to think of eschatology (and with it, ‘vision’) primarily as something off in the future. But the radical call of Jesus was to recognize the reign of God that is already breaking in on us in the present.”⁵⁶

I agree with Van Gelder that the tendency is to think of eschatology as something far in the future rather than the radical call of Jesus to see God’s reign in the present. God’s reign is carried into the neighborhood as the church makes the neighborhood part of its missional vision. This vision is not to be seen as the responsibility of the pastor or leaders only but of the entire

55. Frost and Hirsch, “Shaping of Things.”

56. Van Gelder, “Missional Church.”

congregation. Mission and vision should not be seen as two separate components of the church. Instead, they are very similar, as Malphurs points out: “A Mission and a vision are similar in four ways: Both are biblically based, direction oriented, goal directed, and future focused.”⁵⁷

Leaders determine how effectively the vision of the church reaches out into the community. Van Gelder uses the term “participatory leadership” to describe a new paradigm emerging to replace the professional model:

Participatory leadership for the missional church is grounded in the premise that the church finds its identity in participation in God’s mission in the world, and that it is primarily the Holy Spirit who leads Christian communities. In the previous paradigms of priest, pedagogue, or professional, authority was understood to be concentrated in individuals who held office or who possessed certain professional skills and certification. However, emerging understandings of leadership recognize that it is understood best not as a fixed set of individual roles or attributes but as a process of relational influence. . . . Leadership is one of the gifts of the Spirit (Rom. 12:8), but its function is not to control, dictate, or monopolize the church’s ministry. It is rather to cultivate and steward the faithful participation of the whole community and its gifts in God’s mission.⁵⁸

Jesus is the greatest leader to walk the face of the earth. In John 9:4 he informs his disciples that he must work the works of him who sent him. The Scripture reveals that Jesus, the Son of Man, came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). About this text Timothy S. Laniak suggests, “The ‘lost sheep’ include anyone, rich or poor, ‘righteous’ or ‘sinner’, Jew or Gentile. To call such people ‘lost’ is to imply that they belonged in the fold all along.”⁵⁹ Jesus’ works consisted not only of miracles of healing but also of going into places where people carried out their daily activities. In *Transforming Leadership*, Leighton Ford notes,

For Jesus, . . . vision meant that he saw his mission, the people he met, and everyday life in the light of his Father’s kingdom. This “seeing” was expressed in dynamic acts full of

57. Malphurs, “Dynamic Mission.”

58. Van Gelder and Zscheile, “Missional Church Perspective.”

59. Timothy S. Laniak. “Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible, New Studies in Biblical Theology.” (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 206.

faith, hope and love. . . If we want to be visionaries in Christ, we will long and pray to see as Christ sees. We will seek that vision through the disciplines of reading, of praying, and of thinking originally and radically in ways which may be painful. We will obey that vision, recognizing that vision has its outflow in acts of service, both great and small.⁶⁰

Jesus' relationship with the disciples first began with a purpose or vision: "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (Matt 4:19). Jimmy Long quotes Joseph Myers, saying, "It would do us well to remember that our job is to help people with their lives rather than build infrastructures that help institutions stay alive. Sometimes we focus so much on building a 'healthy church' that we forget to tend to the health of people."⁶¹ A similar view is taken by Frost and Hirsch when they write,

We've come to the conclusion that so much of what we do in the church is "inorganic." It often feels like an artificial experience. If we were organic, we would be much more sensitive to the cultural forces, the patterns and structures and energies, of the people we were trying to reach. We would think like missionaries and spend more time listening to, eating with, and playing with the subculture or neighborhood we were trying to minister to. . . As missionaries, we need to ask "What is good news to these people (What are the existential issues these people are grappling with before God?)" and "What would the church look like for these people?" The answers will give us clues as to what element of the gospel we need to communicate first.⁶²

The church needs visionary leaders as well as a missional imagination in order to follow the example of Jesus. When the vision of the church does not lead it into the world, that vision is limited and will lead to self-focus rather than a kingdom focus. This idea is expressed by Frost and Hirsch:

If the Christian church is to be incarnational and missional, as we believe the N.T. anticipates, and if it's to abandon an us-and-them-mentality, it will need to rediscover the

60. Leighton Ford. "Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values, and Empowering Change." (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 115-16.

61. Jimmy Long. "The Leadership Jump: Building Partnerships Between Existing and Emerging Christian Leaders." (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 107, quoting Joseph Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*, *emersion: Emergent Village Resources for Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

62. Frost and Hirsch, "Shaping of Things."

biblical mode of impacting the world around it. The incarnational infiltration society by all Christians. This infiltration, in order for it to be missional (and not just social), must be marked by the following commitments:

- Holiness (Matt. 5:16; Titus 2:1-10; Micah 6:8)
- Prayer (Eph. 6:19; I Tim. 2:1-6)
- Socializing (I Cor. 10:27-11:1)
- Supporting Evangelism (I Cor. 9:13-14)
- Jesus Talk (I Pet. 3:15; Col. 4:5-6)⁶³

God has to open the eyes of the church to what he is doing in the neighborhood, and only then will the church's vision expand into missional activity. Roxburgh uses the story of Jesus healing the blind man as an illustration of developing new eyes for one's neighborhood: "Moving back into the neighborhood is about learning to see our community with a fresh set of eyes. This step looks at the story of Jesus's healing a blind man. At first, the man sees people, but they look like trees; Jesus touches the man's eyes again, and he sees people." Roxburgh continues, "We may not be physically blind from birth but we can easily take our neighborhoods for granted and stop seeing what is going on there among people. An important part of joining with God in mission-shaped life is learning to see again with fresh eyes, to wake up to the fresh and not-so-obvious ways God is present."⁶⁴ I agree that one's physical sight can be healthy, but yet one can fail to discern what God is doing in one's neighborhood. It is important to maintain spiritual disciplines and be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, just as the early church did in the book of Acts. They prayed and fasted and waited on the Lord to lead them into the world to minister to the needs of others.

63. Frost and Hirsch, "Shaping of Things."

64. Roxburgh, "Missional."

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Missional Activity

It is essential that the church see itself as presented through the eyes of Scripture, rather than as an institution designed to maintain fellowship and spiritual disciplines within its walls. Though these are important characteristics of the church, Van Gelder and Zscheile give perspective when they state,

The church is not a collection of individuals who choose to associate primarily to have their spiritual needs met or do some good in the world. Rather, the church is a community of mutual participation in God's own life and the life of the world—a participation characterized by openness to others. Just as the Trinity's interdependent, communal life is generative and outward reaching in love, so too must the church's life be focused toward others and the world.⁶⁵

Pappas and Planting write, "Mission begins with prayer. The life of prayer will lead us into mission." They believe "the key to doing local mission is discovering your congregation's unique gift."⁶⁶ The early church saw prayer and gifts of the Holy Spirit as means of expanding the gospel message to other regions. The early church prayed and sent out disciples on the basis of what they perceived God had spoken to them. Spiritual gifts were used in various ways to serve the physical and spiritual needs of others. This leading of the Spirit is noted by Roxburgh and Boren as they suggest, "What we have to do is stop for a bit, gather ourselves, and become attentive to our surroundings. This stopping and suspending the need for answers will help us hear what the Spirit is saying to this new place. We believe this journey will be shaped by ordinary people as they enter their neighborhoods and communities and see what God is doing."⁶⁷ In their opinion,

A missional church is formed by the Spirit of God at work in the ordinary people of God in a local context. A practical implication is that this imagination changes the focus of

65. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "Missional Church Perspective."

66. Pappas and Planting, "Mission."

67. Pappas and Planting, "Mission."

leadership. Rather than having plans, programs, strategies, and goals, they ask how they can call forth what the Spirit is doing among the people. When this happens, the potential for discovering the wind of the Spirit is exciting.⁶⁸

Roxburgh presents the idea of believers discerning and naming what God is doing in the neighborhood as a means of following the leading of the Spirit: “You need to practice discernment or the naming of what you believe God might be up to in your neighborhood. This discernment/naming process come through your dwelling in the Word together and you entering the stories of the people in the neighborhood.” He recommends that believers develop a practice of discussing discernment and decisions with others; as they do so, they will learn new skills. As this is done repetitively,

We will not always get it right but, as we practice together, we will have more and more success in understanding what God is doing. Sometimes we will have little more than an inkling or hunch, but other times we’ll see it clearly and have a burning conviction to be involved. This process requires testing out ideas⁶⁹ and perceptions, and this is always done more effectively with others rather than alone.

The Holy Spirit brings various gifts to the church to empower it to continue the work of Christ throughout the earth. God not only provides the church with spiritual gifts by the leading of the Holy Spirit but also uses our natural talents and abilities to express his loving grace to the world. Johnson sees the time of slavery in the life of African Americans as a means God used to provide missional activity in the world. He believes that God works within different cultures to accomplish his missionary plan.⁷⁰ Johnson concludes, “God moves in mysterious ways! God’s gift of the Negro-spiritual helped African Americans deal with the institution of slavery, and now that same gift is ours to share with a dying world.”⁷¹

68. Roxburgh and Boren, “Missional Church.”

69. Roxburgh, “Missional.”

70. Johnson, “The African American Church.”

71. Johnson, “The African American Church.”

Conclusion

The missional imagination of the church is greatly affected by its leaders and organizational structure. The church must embrace the nature of God in order to become God's instrument in a world that needs hope and healing. The Holy Spirit brings about missional transformation in the life of each believer as he empowers each one to fulfill his or her God-given responsibility to be a missionary in the neighborhood, community, and world. As the church enters neighborhoods, it must seek not to change the culture to look like itself but to find what God is doing in the neighborhood and join in what God is doing. Regardless of people's economic, social, or political position, they need to hear the gospel message and witness the accepting, loving grace of God demonstrated through his mission agents. Not only must the church provide a presence, but also it must be willing to share its possessions in meeting felt needs that exist among its neighbors. The vision of churches needs to encompass a passion and pursuit of mission with the motivating support of church leaders. The ultimate dependency must be on the Lord, and both leaders and laity must trust as that as they pray and seek his wisdom, the Spirit of God will lead and protect them along the way as they seek to live a missional imagination in the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

This chapter provided a brief background of the project's vision and a brief overview of the thesis topic. Following these introductory sections, the chapter discusses the project design, project rationale, survey design, and project implementation. The goal of the chapter was to explain the methodology of the study and to clarify the benefit of using exploratory research study research methodology, the selected qualitative research design for the study.

The Project Vision

The researcher for the current study has a rich background and unwavering commitment to providing a sound understanding and foundational design of the topic, *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*. The researcher is an African American pastor and church leader who has served in the ministry for over twenty years and has witnessed a strong focus and commitment to mission programs. Currently, he serves as Senior Pastor and founder of Word Alive Church, a non-denominational church located in Southeast Columbia in South Carolina. He spent the majority of his early childhood rearing in Winnsboro, South Carolina, where he received his early education through the Fairfield Public School System. After graduation from high school, the researcher served in the United States Navy and Naval Reserve. He received his Theological Training at Columbia International University where he received the Master of Divinity degree with a concentration in Spiritual Formation and Pastoral Counseling. Additionally, the researcher is the recipient of many awards, accommodations and certificates throughout his naval, college and civilian career. As an African American pastor and church leader for over twenty years of ministry, the researcher has witnessed a strong focus and commitment to mission programs, including, but not limited to: preaching, singing, fellowship,

politics, social justice, homelessness, incarceration, fund raising, revivals, and local and international missions. From his observations and direct experiences, the researcher concluded that missions primarily focused on addressing needs identified by church leaders based upon the church's mission. At first sight, there was seemingly not an issue with an African American church aligning its ministries directly with the church's mission. However, upon much reflection and resonance based on the scholarly literature on missional imagination, the researcher experienced an epiphany compelling further investigation of the phenomenon of African American churches and missional imagination. The vision of the researcher was that through this thesis-project, he would be able to investigate the issue and provide practical insight for church leaders. Further, as aforementioned in chapter one, but certainly bears repeating, the thesis-project sought to illuminate the reality of church leaders expending their time, energy and efforts in fulfilling the church's mission or in some cases towards their own personal agendas, instead of truly searching to find out what God's mission is for the church and the community.

A Brief Overview of the Thesis Topic

Through developing the thesis-project, *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*, the ultimate goal of the investigation was to assist African American church leaders in recognition of the very common practice and often-subtle difference in fulfilling the church's mission as opposed to clearly hearing and understanding God's mission and instructions for operating within communities. Thus, the desired outcome was that African American church leaders would be encouraged and educated to suspend the practice of focusing on the church's mission or on their personal agendas. Rather, church leaders would be persuaded to surrender their efforts to allow God's plan of redemption to be the priority within African American churches as they develop structure, training, biblical insight and resources to aid them in

expressing God's love and plan for all mankind throughout the world with the focus on God's mission.

Historically, the church has realized the concept of missions or missional imagination as the action of the church sending out missionaries and representatives to accomplish tasks based on the church's identified mission.¹ As it pertains to its missional imagination, the church remains in a transforming state.² Through this sense of formation, the church must be willing to yield in order to move beyond mere planning for missional programs within the church. Rather, the church focuses on how the church can be more visible, purposeful in neighborhoods and in the world based upon what God is doing and what God intends.³

The primary concern for the African American church is the lack of witnessed passion, strategic planning, spiritual development and commitment toward missions that focus on the advancement of the gospel within the local community and throughout the world within the African American church. Thus, this project sought to engage and challenge African American churches to shift from the church trying to accomplish its missions to the imagining and carrying out God's mission. By no means was this effort to reflect a negative light on what is being done in the African American church. However, clearly, the lack of attention given to the development of missional imagination based upon spiritual formation among the leadership and laity regarding taking the gospel beyond the walls of the church into the neighborhoods and into the world remains critical.

The first chapter provided a comprehensive introduction of the thesis topic: *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*. Chapter two outlined the theoretical framework.

1. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "Missional Church Perspective."

2. Van Gelder and Zscheile, "Missional Church Perspective."

3. Roxburgh, "Missional."

Chapter three provided an exhaustive review of the scholarly literature. A brief overview of the thesis topic in light of the discussion of the methodological design was presented as the focus of the current chapter as the Project Design.

The biblical inspiration for the current thesis was anchored in the shared theological principles of two biblical passages well known for their importance in any discussion of missional imagination found in the command given by Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Mark in Matthew 28: 19-20 and Mark 16:15. Thus, the scope of and foremost guidance for the thesis, as biblical research investigation, examines the theology of *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*, focusing on developing a keen understanding of mission[s], missiology, missional imagination, and spiritual formation. The five questions guiding this research effort may be found in chapter two.

Project Design

Creswell explained that an exploratory research study should begin with the selection of a specific case.⁴ The specific exploratory research study focus for this thesis-project is the African American church. To reiterate the focus discussed in chapter one, the thesis-project was conducted with the primary goal of mining information obtained from church leaders of African American churches, thus survey research design will be used. The overall purpose of the thesis-project was to examine the theological phenomenon of missional imagination from the perspective of church leaders from selected African American churches.

The survey for the project was designed based upon methodological research best practices. Creswell suggested that survey design is often the best way to get information and

4. John Creswell, "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches." 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2009), 101.

feedback used in planning and program improvement.⁵ Flyvbjerg added that through strategic design and implementation, a survey is a systematic process used in gathering information on a specific topic by asking questions of individuals and then generalizing the results to the groups represented by the respondents.⁶ Therefore, survey design was selected as the most accessible methodology for acquiring the requisite knowledge to gain a greater understanding of the topic at hand.

Creswell (2009) suggested that the development of the survey should take into consideration the following four critical questions guiding project design: (1) What is the goal? (2) What is the target population? (3) What is the timing? and, (4) What mode will be used?⁷ As aforementioned in the onset of this work, the goal of the current thesis-project was to: (1) examine the perceptions of missional imagination of church leaders from selected African American churches, and (2) examine how selected African American church leaders address the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities and to address international issues among Blacks in the diaspora. The ultimate goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of how church leaders understand the issue of missional imagination. Thus, the target population was church leaders of African American churches. The time frame for the collection of data was thirty days. The mode of collection was via postal mail, electronic mail, and interviews.

During the survey design process, careful consideration was given to the issues of reliability and validity. As such, the survey questions were written so that, as much as possible,

5. Creswell, "Research Design."

6. Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research." (Denmark: Aalborg University Press, 2006), (Paper) Available from: doi: 10.1177/1077800405284363 Qualitative Inquiry. vol. 12 no. 2 219-245. <http://qix.sagepub.com/content/12/2/219.short>, 105.

7. Creswell, "Research Design."

each question would mean the same thing to everyone. Additionally, a major consideration in the project design and refinement was the extent to which each survey question measured the idea and concept it was intended to measure.

Project Rationale

The major component of the thesis research was descriptive qualitative comparative exploratory research study analysis as the research model. The research design was strategically crafted in order to maximize efforts for in-depth analysis of the critical phenomenon of missional imagination in African American churches.

As previously explained in the preface and in chapter two, the overall significance and rationale for the present thesis-project was two-fold. First, the thesis-project examined the theological phenomenon of missional imagination from the perspective of church leaders from selected African American churches, particularly from the vantage point of understanding how the leaders addressed the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities and to address international issues among Blacks in the diaspora. Secondly, my sincere hope was that through this project-thesis, I would investigate the issue and provide practical insight for church leaders. Further, I had hoped that this project-thesis would illuminate the reality of church leaders expending their time, energy and efforts in fulfilling the church's mission or in some cases towards their own personal agendas, instead of truly searching to find out what God's mission is for the church and the community.

Creswell offered that descriptive qualitative comparative exploratory research study analysis will maximize efforts for in-depth analysis investigation of critical phenomenon.⁸ Yin recommended

8. Creswell, "Research Design."

descriptive qualitative comparative exploratory research study analysis when the purpose f the study was to understand unique features of a phenomenon in its natural setting---

in this case, the church.⁹ Indeed, the purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the theological phenomenon of missional imagination from the perspective of church leaders from selected African American churches, particularly from the vantage point of understanding how the leaders addressed the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities and to address international issues among Blacks in the diaspora. As such, my sincere hope was that through this project-thesis, I would investigate the issue and provide practical insight for church leaders. Further, I had hoped that this project-thesis would illuminate the reality of church leaders expending their time, energy and efforts in fulfilling the church's mission or in some cases towards their own personal agendas, instead of truly searching to find out what God's mission is for the church and the community. The selected methodological design afforded the researcher access to church leaders of African American churches who have engaged in teaching and practice of missional imagination. Thus, the most accessible methodological design was descriptive qualitative, exploratory research study analysis.

It should be noted that some scholars have been skeptical over the use of descriptive qualitative exploratory research study research. For example, Stake, Denzin, and Lincoln (2005) criticized the exploratory research study model and declared exploratory research study methodology to be a mere study selection and a deliberate research choice, but not a true methodology.¹⁰

9. Creswell, "Research Design."

10. Robert Stake, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, "The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research." 3rd. ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Ltd, 1995), 127.

However, scholars, such as, Creswell, (2009) and Flyvberg (2006) rebutted and attempted to clarify the significance, impact, and necessity of exploratory research study research.¹¹ Flyvberg offered that there are five common misunderstandings about exploratory research study research to include the following:

- (a) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; (b) one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-exploratory research study cannot contribute to scientific development; (c) the exploratory research study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; (d) the exploratory research study contains a bias toward verification; and (e) it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies. (p. 105)

Flyvberg (2006) concluded that with the increased use of exploratory research study research, the research community would be considerably improved.¹²

In the Introduction to *The Nature of the Case Research Study*, Orum et al defined exploratory research study research “as an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon”.¹³ The researchers also made the important point that exploratory research study research is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources.¹⁴

Creswell concurred and helped researchers understand the benefits of exploratory research.¹⁵ He pointed out that exploratory research study research consists of investigating a case “within a real-life, contemporary context or setting.”¹⁶ Further, Creswell presented exploratory research as “a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, a comprehensive research strategy.”¹⁷

11. Flyvberg, “Five Misunderstandings.”

12. Flyvberg, “Five Misunderstandings.”

13. Anthony Orum, Joe Feagin and Gideon Sjoberg. “The Nature of the Exploratory research study.” (Chapel Hill, NC. The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 58.

14. Orum, Feagin and Sjoberg, “Nature of Exploratory research study.”

15. Creswell, “Research Design.”

He defined exploratory research study research as, “A type of design in qualitative research that may be an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry.”¹⁸ He distinguishes exploratory research study research as:

A qualitative approach which allows the researcher to explore a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviewing, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case themes.¹⁹

Creswell and other scholars have provided sufficient clarity of the benefits of exploratory research study research. Thus, descriptive qualitative comparative exploratory research study analysis was used.

Survey Design and Interview Template

The evaluation design was threefold. First, a survey, the “Missional Imagination Questionnaire” was developed and administered to ten church leaders.²⁰ The compressive survey was designed to generate data reflecting the perceptions of missional imagination of church leaders from selected African American churches.

The Survey

The comprehensive survey paralleled the interview template and was used to gather data reflecting how the selected African American church leaders addressed the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities through survey and interview. The survey instrument consisted of 20 questions related to missional imagination. The survey instrument was strategically designed to encompass each of the research

16. Creswell, “Research Design.”

17. Creswell, “Research Design.”

18. Creswell, “Research Design.”

19. Creswell, “Research Design.”

20. See Appendix.

the African American church? (Interpretive Question) Survey questions six through nine were designed to extract information on research question number two: How can a Missional Imagination be developed within the context of a top-down leadership model within the African American church? Survey questions ten through twelve aligned with research question number three: How can a Missional Imagination be developed in the African American church while respecting its culture practices? While, survey questions thirteen through fifteen were designed for research question number four: What biblical-theological insight can be used as examples in developing a Missional Imagination in the African American church? The final survey questions, sixteen through twenty allowed reflection and paralleled research question five: How can future ministry in the African American church be enhanced through the development of a Missional Imagination? Ultimately, the goal of the survey was to ascertain the perceptions and understanding of missional imagination by pastors and church leaders of African American churches.

The Interview Template

Beyond the survey, additional information was gathered from interview participants. The researcher interviewed four participants. Creswell pointed out that, “Typically, exploratory research study researchers study current, real-life cases that are in progress so that they can gather accurate information not lost by time.”²¹ He also shared that it is extremely important to select participants who will be true, honest, sincere, and unthreatened by the interview.²² The interview participants for this exploratory research study were selected pastors and church leaders who have a plethora of demonstrated experience in preaching, teaching, and

21. Creswell, “Research Design.”

22. Creswell, “Research Design.”

implementing missional imagination. Neither intimidation nor coercion was used in the identification and selection of the participants. Participants were offered the opportunity to remain anonymous if desired. However, unanimously, participants insisted that the actual names be used for authenticity and in support of God's work.

Project Implementation

The *Missional Imagination Questionnaire* (see Appendix) was distributed to ten church leaders of African American churches. The goal was to provide a wide range of diversity afforded a cross-section of survey completion, and additionally, to provide multiple perspectives from the church leaders.

The surveys were administered by postal mail or email directly to the church leaders. These church leaders were previously contacted by the researcher and confirmed a clear understanding of the purpose of the research and agreed to complete and return the survey. Participating church leaders clearly understood that the project was designed to serve as a barometer gaging their perceptions of missional imagination. The goal was to have each distributed survey completed and returned; the goal of 100% participation was met.

The interviews were conducted by employing the *Missional Imagination Questionnaire*. Using the survey as a standardized open-ended interview template, the researcher interviewed four selected pastors of African American churches. These individuals represented significant "real-life" participants in the African American church. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour per interview session and were either conducted in person at the selected church cites, during scheduled meetings, through visitations, during revivals or other services, or via telephone communications.

Data Analysis

Creswell pointed out that the data analysis approach selected for case studies may vary. In some case studies, researchers will report on the entire case.²³ However, for some case studies, the researcher will select multiple cases to analyze.²⁴ Also, Creswell offered that, “Data should be analyzed through a description of the case and themes of the case as well as through cross-case themes.”²⁵ Likewise, the data analysis process “allows the researcher to develop data analysis of one or more cases.”²⁶ To that end, the data analysis process for this exploratory research study was thematic analysis using descriptive coding. The data was collected from the survey and interviews provided by the church leaders. The interview data was transcribed. The survey data compiled and analyzed to isolate and illuminate the significant, recurrent themes shared by the church leaders. Chapter Five summarized the results of the research and provided a comprehensive analysis of the themes, topics, and issues that were illuminated.

Summary

Access to the participants (i.e. survey and interviews) were based strictly upon the Research and Human Subjects guidelines in accordance with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. In that this exploratory research study was conducted primarily through survey and interviews, the researcher established all research relationships as identified by Weis and employed Weis’ recommendations as a guideline for the study.²⁷

23. Creswell, “Research Design.”

24. Creswell, “Research Design.”

25. Creswell, “Research Design.”

26. Creswell, “Research Design.”

27. Weis, “Learning from Strangers.”

Weis offered the following five points on the researcher's role that were achieved in this study:

- 1) The interviewer and the respondent will work together to produce information useful to the research project.
- 2) The interviewer will define the areas for exploration and will monitor the quality of the material. The respondents will provide observations, external and internal, accepting the interviewer's guidance regarding topics and the kind of report that is needed.
- 3) The interviewer will not ask questions out of idle curiosity. On the other hand, the interviewer will be a privileged inquirer in the sense that the interviewer may ask for information the respondent would not make generally available, maybe would not tell anyone at all.
- 4) The interviewer will respect the respondent's integrity. This means that the interviewer will not question the respondent's appraisals, choices, motives, right to observations, or personal worth.
- 5) The interviewer will ensure, that during the interviews and afterwards, that the respondent will not be damaged or disadvantaged because of the respondent's participation on the interview. In particular, the interviewer will treat the respondent's participation and communication as confidential information.²⁸

Following Weis' paradigm afforded an appropriate negotiation of subjectivity and established comfort levels between the participants and the researcher.

Velez summarizes key methodological assumptions and limitations of qualitative research by pointing out:

Qualitative researchers are not immune to significant assumptions. First, qualitative inquiry believes that reality is subjective and that social environments are personal constructs created by individual interpretations that are not generalizable; these beliefs are rooted in constructivism rather than positivism. Therefore, the assumption is that there is not a generalizable reality that is quantifiable for a larger population than an individual case. Qualitative researchers assume that rich description and a deep understanding are indicative of their methodology, which insinuates that other research paradigms are not deep.²⁹

28. Weis, "Learning from Strangers."

29. Angela M. Velez. "Evaluating Research Methods: Assumptions, Strengths, and Weaknesses of Three Educational Research Paradigms." (2009), Para. 3 Doi- <http://www.unco.edu/ae-extra/2008/9/velez.html>.

In this study, the researcher is clear that the phenomenon of *Missional Imagination in the African American Church* was investigated from the limited vantage point of 14 pastors or church leaders, and that far many more African American churches exist in the United States and internationally. However, the implications for what was found from the surveys and interviews lend itself to providing an in-depth understanding of the issue of *Missional Imagination in the African American Church* that may be useful for aspiring and developing pastors and church leaders.

In their abstract, Sinkovics, et al. provided a concise discussion of the matter of trustworthiness in qualitative research, saying that,

Reliability, validity, generalizability and objectivity are fundamental concerns for quantitative researchers. For qualitative research, however, the role of the dimensions is blurred. Some researchers agree that these dimensions are not applicable to qualitative research and a qualitative researcher's tool chest should be geared towards trustworthiness encompassing issues such as credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability.³⁰

In this exploratory research study research, the researcher employed strict adherence to Weis' paradigm for establishing the integrity of the role of the researcher.³¹ Additionally, having a clear understanding of the assumptions, limitations, and benefits of qualitative research, in general, and in particular exploratory research study research, this study lends itself to achieving a high level of trustworthiness among peer researchers, institutions, and among the national and international church community.

30. Rudolf R. Sinkovics, Elfriede Penz and Pervaiz Ghauri. "Enhancing the Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research in International Business." (*Management International Review*, 2008) Para 1. Doi-10.1007/511575-008-0103-2.

31. Weis, "Learning from Strangers."

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter Five will overview the data and presented an analysis and summary of the research findings of the research project, *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*. The overall purpose of the thesis-project was to examine the theological phenomenon of missional imagination from the perspective of church leaders from selected African American churches.

Issues of Anonymity

Chapter Four detailed issues on anonymity. As such, integrity, respect, and professionalism were maintained throughout the research process. Each participating pastor from the selected African American churches was informed of their rights to protection through the use of pseudonyms. All participants indicated that anonymity was not a concern and preferred to share their experiences and journeys through the church's actual identity. However, the names and physical locations of the churches have been changed to ensure anonymity and integrity of the research.

Chapter Framework

The framework for the summary of research findings included: (1) pertinent qualitative data extracted from the questionnaire, *Missional Imagination Questionnaire* and (2) a comprehensive presentation of direct responses as expressed by the participants via the questionnaire and interviews. See Appendix A: *Missional Imagination Questionnaire*. The purpose of the study was to understand unique features of a phenomenon in its natural setting—

in this case, the African American church.¹ Thus, the most accessible methodological design was selected for this exploratory project. Additionally, interviews with selected pastors were conducted. The guiding research questions can be found in chapter one.

Summary of Findings

As a hybrid study using both quantitative and qualitative research methodology, the current research was primarily conducted through the use of a triangulated method. A comprehensive questionnaire and direct interviews with church leaders of African American churches informed the present exploratory research study. However, the primary instrument used was the questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaire afforded the researcher the opportunity to collect data and to gain perspectives of the theological phenomenon of missional imagination from the perspective of and via the voices of church leaders from selected African American churches.

The questionnaire instrument consisted of 20 questions related to missional imagination. The comprehensive questionnaire was used to gather data reflecting how the selected African American church leaders address or do not address the issue of developing missions to impact common problems within the local African American communities and how pastors address or do not address international issues among Blacks in the diaspora. The goal was to have each distributed questionnaire completed and returned. Ten pastors from African American churches participated in the questionnaire and four pastors from African American churches participated in interviews. As presented in Table 1: *Participating Pastors and Churches*, the pastors participating in the project represented four states: ten from South Carolina, and one each from the states of Maryland, New York, and North Carolina. Thirteen of the pastors were men; one participant was a woman.

1. Creswell, “Research Design.”

Table 5-1: Participating Pastors and Churches

Pastor	Church	Location
Pastor Ronnie Best	Bennettsville Freewill Baptist Church	Bennettsville SC
Pastor Troy Campbell	South Center of Christ Missionary Baptist Church	Columbia MD
Pastor Roberta Norman	Peace Christian Tabernacle	Redgroove NC
Reverend Dr. Raymond Noble	Cedar Creek Baptist Church	Missonville NC
Reverend Dr. William Gerald	God of Hope Christian Center	Fairfield SC
Pastor Harry Warren	Victory Peace Mission	East SC
Pastor Allen McCombs	Church of Our Lord Christian Ministries	Bamberg SC
Reverend Dr. Larry Johnson	St. Philips Baptist Church	Buffalo NY
Pastor Jamal Keith Sanford	Bible Voice Christian Center	Walterboro SC
Reverend Nathaniel Freeman	Holy Cross Christian Center	Gaston SC
Pastor Waverly Patrick	Risen Son Baptist Church	Breechville SC
Bishop Carlos Mendille	Solid Rock Christian Ministries	Langston SC
Reverend Alfred Nance	Sunrise Baptist Church	Rockport SC
Pastor John Whitaker	Richard Allen AME Church	Allentown SC

Defining Missional Imagination

As an open-ended inquiry, Question number1 was designed to provide a platform for participants to share their definition of *missional imagination*. In each response, participants incorporated some reference to the importance of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and sharing the *Good News of Jesus Christ* in their definition of *missional imagination*. Several respondents included within the context of their definition the following key engagement concepts: to offer “creative initiates,” to “think outside-the-box,” and to try “new and creative ways” to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For example, Pastor Harry Warren, pastor of Victory Peace Mission, East, SC, emphasized the importance of innovation. Pastor Warren defined missional imagination as:

Utilizing creative initiatives and “outside-the-box” thinking to conduct and/or support international missions and outreach ministries to reach, teach, and provide assistance for

people in foreign lands, outside of one's native/home country as led by the Holy Spirit.²

Likewise, Pastor Troy Campbell, pastor of South Center of Christ Missionary Baptist Church, Columbia, Maryland emphasized the need for innovation and creativity in establishing missional imagination in the African American church. Pastor Campbell stated:

As a church leader, I define missional imagination as our ability to see new and creative ways to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe missional imagination is allowing God to show us effective ways to reach our communities and the world without limitations.³

Reverend Dr. Larry Johnson, pastor of St. Philips Baptist Church added:

It is the use of various methods in sharing the Good News with others so that they may accept and grow in Christ.⁴

Additionally, Pastor Waverly Patrick, pastor of Risen Son Breechville, SC shared that the focus of missional imagination should be realized through imaginative reality. Pastor Patrick stated:

As a church leader, ...missional imagination is the imaginative reality of seeing and responding to life's everyday situations through the compassionate eyes of Jesus. Consequently, I see every opportunity to respond, relate and release the mission of Jesus in daily living and work activities. This is in contrast to dualistic living where one is "spiritual" or "religious" only during Sundays and midweek services, but separate or leave God out of marketplace life.

An additional resounding theme illuminated in defining missional imagination was the perspective of missional imagination as ever-evolving. Pastor Ronnie Best, pastor of Bennettsville Freewill Baptist Church, Bennettsville, South Carolina stated:

The mission of the local church is clearly defined in Matthew 28:19. The methods of how we reach those who don't know the Christ and for those who are in need, must evolve. We must continue to fine-tune how we communicate the Gospel. I define missional imagination as the mission must stay the same, but the method must continue to evolve.⁵

2. Harry Warren. Interview with Researcher. Personal Interview. Columbia, SC, February 28, 2019.

3. Troy Campbell. "Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019."

4. Larry Johnson. Interview with Researcher. Personal Interview. Columbia, SC, February 22, 2019.

5. Ronnie Best. "Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019."

Pastor John Whitaker, pastor of Richard Allen AME Church, Allentown, SC agreed with Pastor Best and cited Matthew 28 as the anchor scripture for missional imagination. Also, Pastor Whitaker intimated that missional imagination encompasses evolved thinking. Pastor Whitaker pointed out:

I would replace the term missional imagination with the words: missionary mindset. The vision of the church, our thought patterns, and programming stem from our commitment to the missionary mandate given in Matthew 28:19-20.⁶

Reverend Dr. Raymond Noble, pastor of Cedar Creek Baptist Church, Missionville NC reiterated the theme of change related to missional imagination. Rev. Dr. Noble stated that “As a church leader, …acting out God’s mission and not the church’s mission in a way to change the identity and culture of the church to better serve this present age”⁷ is a chief principle of missional imagination.

Focusing on change and development, Reverend Dr. William Gerald, pastor of God of Hope Christian Center, Fairfield SC shared:

Missional imagination is developing a Christ-centered, Christ-oriented congregation where the environment and culture reflect that relationship. (Where Christ is formed in us) As a result of that relationship, we take Christ to the community under His leadership and in His power.⁸

Dr. Gerald continued:

But I have not termed it as missional imagination as I preach it to them. But, I have transformed my messages to be more Christ centered to develop spiritual formation in the believers.⁹

Participating pastors offered varying perspectives of the definition of missional imagination. _

2. John Whitaker. “Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”
3. Raymond Noble. “Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”
4. Larry Johnson. Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”
5. Larry Johnson. Questionnaire.

Pastor Roberta Norman, pastor of Peace Christian Tabernacle, Redgroove NC defined missional imagination as:

What a person or group sees as being God's mission or assignment for them and how they carry out that mission or assignment.¹⁰

Pastor Alfred Nance, pastor of Sunrise Baptist Church, Rockport SC indicated that missional imagination referred to:

Service outside the walls of the church into the community. Also, cultivating the membership into disciples.¹¹

Additionally, Pastor Allen McCombs, pastor of Church of our Lord Christian Ministries, Bamberg SC offered,

Missional imagination to me is using the word of God as the “grid” or blueprint of what He desires to do in the world/territory where the church is located. And through prayer, meditations, discussions, receiving and implementing a strategy to fulfill what God wants to do through His church.¹²

Bishop Carlos Mendille, pastor of Solid Rock Christian Ministries, Langston SC offered:

Missional imagination as I understand it is the awareness of the need and opportunity for missions locally and abroad as well as the incorporation of it in our church culture.¹³

Reverend Nathaniel Freeman, pastor of Holy Cross Christian Center, Gaston SC viewed missional imagination as “different kinds of ways to help people and show God’s love to others.”¹⁴ While Pastor Jamal Keith Sanford, pastor of Bible Voice Christian Center, Gaston, SC would define missional imagination as “the ability to discern the call of God for your church concerning missions knowing the season, the place and what your mission is.”¹⁵

10. Roberta Norman. “Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”

11. Alfred Nance. Interview with Researcher. Personal Interview. North, SC, March 1, 2019.

12. Allen McCombs. “Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”

13. Carlos Mendille. “Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”

14. Nathaniel Freeman. Interview with Researcher. Personal Interview. Eastover, SC, February 18, 2019.

15. Jamal K. Sanford. “Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”

Developing Missional Imagination in the Church

In addition to question number 1, questionnaire questions 2 through 5, were designed as interpretive questions and focused on research question number one: What can be learned about developing a Missional Imagination in the African American church?

When asked “Do you teach/preach missional imagination to your congregation, 92.86% or thirteen of the fourteen participating pastors indicated that they engage in teaching and/or preaching missional imagination to the congregation. See Table 5-2: *Teaching/Preaching Missional Imagination*.

When asked if missional activities and programs initiated at the participating churches were determined by and primarily focused on addressing needs identified by the church leaders based on the church’s mission, 92.86% of pastors indicated that they agree or strongly agree. When asked if missional activities and programs initiated at the participating churches were determined by and primarily focused on addressing the pastor’s leadership agenda, 85.7% of pastors indicated that they strongly disagree or disagree. When asked if missional activities and programs initiated at the participating churches were determined primarily focused on addressing God’s mission for the church and community, 92.86% of pastors indicated that they agree or strongly agree. Tables 5-3, 5-4, and 5-5 provide a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-2: Teaching/Preaching Missional Imagination

Yes	No	Percentage of Pastors Teaching and/or Preaching Missional Imagination
13	1	92.86%

Table 5-3: Missional Activities and Programs Determined by Church Leaders (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	0	1	10	3
0%	0%	7.14%	71.43%	21.43%

Table 5-4: Missional Activities and Programs Determined by Pastor's Agenda (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
2	10	0	1	1
14.29%	71.43%	0%	7.14%	7.14%

Table 5-5: Missional Activities and Programs Determined by God's Mission (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	0	0	4	9
7.14%	0%	0%	28.57%	64.29%

Missional Imagination and Church Leadership

Questionnaire questions six through nine were designed as interpretive inquiries to extract information on research question number two: How can a Missional Imagination be developed within the context of a top-down leadership model within the African American church? 92.86% of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed that the ultimate role of the pastor is to provide leadership to the congregation regarding missional imagination. However, when asked if the ultimate role of the pastor's designee is to provide leadership to the congregation regarding missional imagination, 46% of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed; 35.71% of the pastors disagreed or strongly disagreed; 14.29% indicated a neutral stance. Regarding the importance of teaching and/or preaching missional imagination to the congregation, 92.86% of the pastors indicated that they agree or strongly agree. Likewise, 92.86% of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed about the importance of developing missional imagination activities and programs with the congregation. Tables 5-6, 5-7, 5-8, and 5-9 provide a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-6: Role of the Pastor in Missional Leadership (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	0	0	7	5
7.14%	0%	0%	50%	35.71%

Table 5-7: Role of Pastor's Designee in Missional Leadership (Individual Response and Percentage)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	5	2	5	2
0%	35.71%	14.29%	35.71%	14.29%

Table 5-8: Importance of Teaching/Preaching Missional Imagination (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	0	0	7	6
7.14%	0%	0%	50%	35.71%

Table 5-9: Importance of Developing Missional Activities and Programs (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	0	8	5
0%	7.14%	0%	57.14%	35.71%

A Critique of Missional Activities and Programs

Questionnaire questions ten through twelve were designed as interpretive questions that align with research question number three: How can a Missional Imagination be developed in the African American church while respecting its culture practices? 100 percent of pastors identified preaching as an appropriate program or activity for missions. 71.43% of pastors considered incarceration programs appropriate for missions. 64.29% of pastors indicated that

homelessness ministries and local missions were appropriate missions. 64.29% of pastors indicated that fellowship was an appropriate activity for missions. Although, 50% of pastors indicated that social justice was an appropriate activity or program for missions, 28.57% or less of participating pastors indicated that revivals, singing, fundraising, and politics were appropriate missional activities. 7.14% indicated that international activities were appropriate missional activities.

The following programs and activities were identified as programs and activities that were inappropriate missional activities: politics (50%), fundraising (21.43%), singing (21.43%), social justice (21.43%), preaching (14.29%), revivals (14.29%), fellowship (7.14%), homelessness (7.14%) and incarceration (7.14%).

At 92.86%, preaching was identified by 13 of the 14 participating pastors as the most common missional activity that participating churches initiated. Homelessness ministries was identified as the second most resounding activity as an existing church program at 64.29% or by 9 pastors. This activity was followed by fellowship at 64.29% by 8 pastors. Revivals (50% or 7 pastors) were identified as the third most common activity engaged in at the participating churches. Five pastors at 35.71% indicated that fundraising and incarceration ministries existed at their churches. While 4 pastors at 28.57% indicated that their churches actively engaged local missions, singing, and social justice programs as missional programs and activities. International activities and political programs were identified by 2 pastors at 14.29% as missional activities or programs that their churches initiated. Tables 5-10a, 5-10b, 5-11a, 5-11b, 5-12a, and 5-12b provide a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-10a: Appropriate Missional Activities and Programs by Highest to Lowest and Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages

Missional Programs and Activities Appropriateness Highest to Lowest Rating	Individual Response	Cohort Percentage
Preaching	14	100%
Incarceration	11	78.57%
Homelessness	9	64.29%
Local Missions	9	64.29%
Fellowship	8	64.29%
Social Justice	7	50%
Revivals	4	28.57%
Singing	5	35.71%
Fundraising	4	28.57%
Politics	4	28.57%
International	1	7.14%

Table 5-10b: Appropriate Missional Activities and Programs

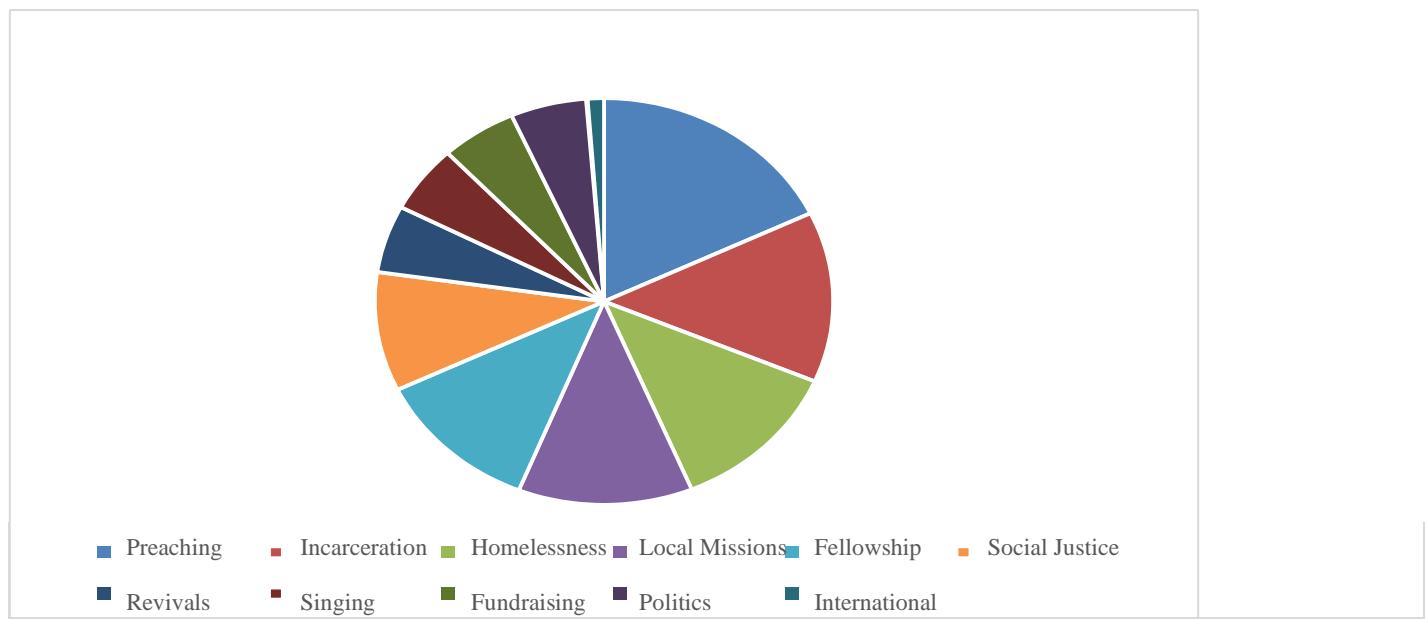


Table 5-11a: Inappropriate Missional Activities and Programs by Highest to Lowest and Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages

Missional Programs and Activities Inappropriateness Highest to Lowest Rating	Individual Response	Cohort Percentage
Politics	7	50%
Fundraising	3	21.43%
Singing	3	21.43%
Social Justice	3	21.43%
Preaching	2	14.29%
Revivals	3	21.34%
Fellowship	1	7.14%
Homelessness	1	7.14%
Incarceration	1	7.14%

Table 5-11b: Inappropriate Missional Activities and Programs

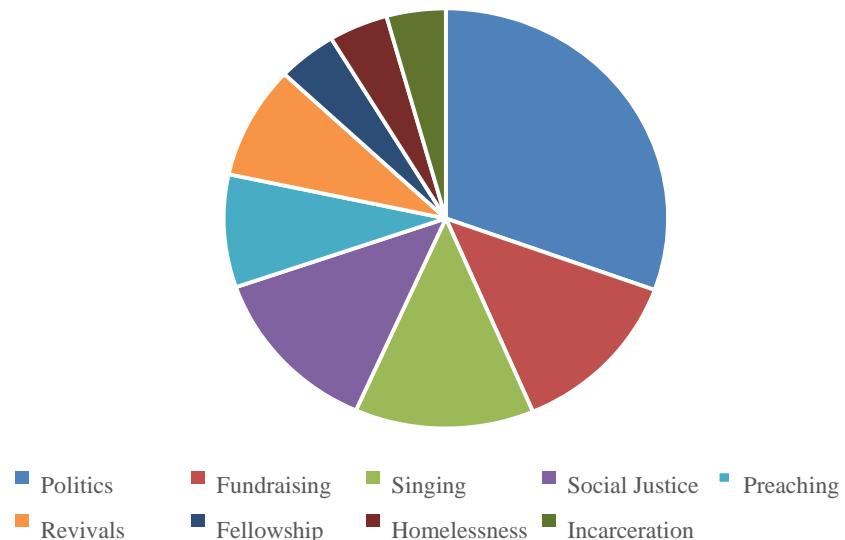
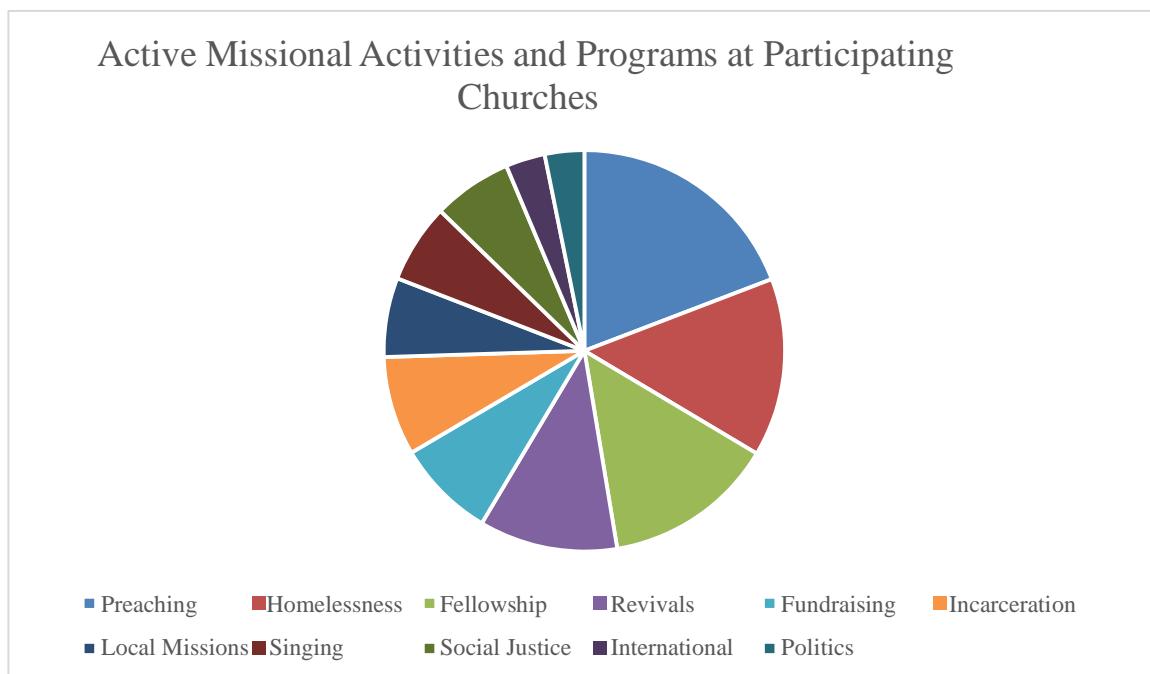


Table 5-12a: Active Missional Activities and Programs at Participating Churches by Highest to Lowest and Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages

Missional Programs and Activities Appropriateness Highest to Lowest Rating	Individual Response	Cohort Percentage
Preaching	13	92.86%
Homelessness	9	64.29%
Fellowship	9	64.29%
Revivals	7	50%
Fundraising	5	35.71%
Incarceration	5	35.71%
Local Missions	4	28.57%
Singing	5	35.71%
Social Justice	4	28.57%
International	2	14.29%
Politics	2	14.29%

Table 5-12b: Active Missional Activities and Programs at Participating Churches



The Scriptures and Missional Imagination

Questionnaire questions thirteen through fifteen were designed as normative inquiries for research question number four: What biblical-theological insight can be used as examples in developing a Missional Imagination in the African American church?

Question 13 asked the participating pastors to share three (3) scriptures that best provide the biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching the tenets of missional imagination. Eleven pastors or 78.57%, indicated that this was the best scripture to contextualize missional imagination.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”¹⁶

The second most common scriptures identified by 35.71% or five pastors were,

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”¹⁷

“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation’”¹⁸

The only additional common scripture identified by 18.3% or two pastors reads,

“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you^[a] a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”¹⁹

16. Matthew 28: 19-20. New International Version.

17. Acts 1:8. New International Version.

18. Mark 16:15. New International Version.

19. Acts 13:47. New International Version

Although there were no other common scriptures shared by the participating pastors, the following were the individual scriptures shared by pastors that best provide biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching missional imagination: Acts 1:8 KJV, Acts, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, Acts 26: 18-20, I Corinthians 13, Jeremiah 45:3, John 4, Luke 4:18, Mark 5:35, Matthew 9:35-36, Matthew 10:1, 5-8, Matthew 16:18, Matthew 24:14, Matthew 25: 31-46, Philippians 4:15-16, Revelations 5:9, Revelations 7:9, Romans 1:16, Romans 2:11-16, and Romans 10:13-14, Tit 2:11, Tit 2:12, Tit 2:13, and Tit 2:14. Table 5-13 provides a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-13: Scriptures for Understanding, Preaching, and/or Teaching Missional Imagination by Highest to Lowest and Individual Responses and Percentages

Scriptures Highest to Lowest Rating	Individual Response	Percentage
Matthew 28:19-20	10	71.43%
Acts 1:8	5	35.71%
Mark 16:15	5	35.71%
Act 13:47	2	18.3%
Acts, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21	1	7.14%
Acts 26: 18-20	1	7.7%
I Corinthians 13	1	7.14%
Jeremiah 45:3	1	7.14%
John 4	1	7.14%
Luke 4:18	1	7.7%
Mark 5:35	1	7.14%
Matthew 9:35-36	1	7.7%
Matthew 10:1, 5-8	1	7.14%
Matthew 16:18	1	7.7%
Matthew 24:14	1	7.14%
Matthew 25: 31-46	1	7.14%
Philippians 4:15-16	1	7.7%
Revelations 5:9	1	7.14%
Revelations 7:9	1	7.14%
Romans 1:16	1	7.7%
Romans 2:11-16	1	7.14%
Romans 10:13-14	1	7.7%
Titus 2:11	1	7.14%
Titus 2:12	1	7.14%
Titus 2:13	1	7.7%
Titus 2:14	1	7.14%

Question 14 asked the participating pastors to identify the three (3) most prominent biblical figures who best provide the biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching missional imagination. Unanimously, all fourteen or 100% of the pastors, indicated that the Apostle Paul was one of the best biblical figures to contextualize missional imagination. The second most common biblical figure identified by 78.57% or eleven pastors was Jesus Christ. Pastors identified two additional shared biblical figures who provided context for understanding missional imagination, The Apostle Peter was identified by 42.86% or six pastors. While, the Apostle John was identified by 14.29% or two pastors. Although there were no other common biblical figures shared by the participating pastors, the following are the individual biblical figures shared by pastors that best provide biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching missional imagination: Abraham, David, Isiah, Luke, Matthew, Nehemiah, and Phillip. Table 5-14 provides a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-14: Biblical Figures for Understanding, Preaching, and/or Teaching Missional Imagination by Highest to Lowest and Individual Responses and Percentages

Biblical Figures Highest to Lowest Rating	Individual Response	Percentage
Paul	13	100%
Jesus Christ	10	71.43%
Peter	6	42.86%
John	2	14.29%
Phillip	2	14.29%
Abraham	1	7.14%
Aquila	1	7.14%
Barnabas	1	7.14%
David	1	7.14%
Isiah	1	7.14%
Luke	1	7.14%
Matthew	1	7.14%
Nehemiah	1	7.14%
Priscilla	1	7.14%
Silas	1	7.14%
Timothy	1	7.14%
Titus	1	7.14%

Question 15 asked the participating pastors if there are biblical differences and understanding among the use of the terms mission(s), missiology, missional imagination, and spiritual formation. 61.4% or 8 of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed that there are biblical differences and understanding among the use of the terms mission(s), missiology, missional imagination, and spiritual formation; 28.57% or 4 pastors selected a neutral response; and, 7.6 or one pastor disagreed that there are biblical differences and understanding among the use of the terms mission(s), missiology, missional imagination, and spiritual formation. Table 5-15 provides a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-15: Distinctions Among Mission(s), Missiology, Missional Imagination, and Spiritual Formation (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentage)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
0	1	4	5	3
0%	7.14%	28.57%	35.71%	21.43%

The final questionnaire questions, sixteen through twenty were designed as pragmatic inquiries allowing a platform for reflection and paralleling research question five: How can future ministry in the African American church be enhanced through the development of a Missional Imagination? Question 16 asked the participating pastors if the ultimate purpose for missions is to express God's love and plan for all mankind throughout the world with the focus on God's mission. 92.86% or 12 of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed that the ultimate purpose for missions is to express God's love and plan for all mankind throughout the world with the focus on God's mission. 28.57% or 4 pastors selected a neutral response; and, 7.6 or one pastor disagreed that there are biblical differences and understanding among the use of the terms mission(s), missiology, missional imagination, and spiritual formation.

Table 5-16 provides a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-16: Ultimate Purpose of Missions (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
1	0	0	4	8
7.14%	0%	0%	28.57%	57.14%

Question 17 asked the participating pastors if members of their congregation were encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs. 100% or 13 of the pastors indicated that their congregation were encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs. Table 5-17 provides a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-17: Engagement of Congregation in Missional Activities and Programs (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

YES	NO	No Response
13	0	0
100%	0%	0%

Question 18 asked the participating pastors if members of the local community were encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs. 57.14% or 8 pastors indicated that their local community was encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs. While 28.57% or 4 pastors indicated that they do not encourage the local community to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs, 7.14% or 1 pastor did not respond. Table 5-18 provides a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-18: Engagement of Local Community in Missional Activities and Programs (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

YES	NO	No Response
8	4	1
57.14%	28.57%	7.14%

Question 19 asked the participating pastors if members of the international community were encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs.

57.14% or 8 pastors indicated that the international community was encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs. While 21.43% or 3 pastors indicated that they do not encourage the local community to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs, 14.29% or 2 pastors did not respond. Table 5-19 provides a graphic presentation of the results.

Table 5-19: Engagement of International Community in Missional Activities and Programs (Individual Responses and Cohort Percentages)

YES	NO	No Response
8	3	2
57.14%	21.43%	14.29%

Question 20 participating pastors were invited to describe the contents of an ideal missional activity or program desired at their church for their congregation. Additionally, the pastors were asked to describe the missional activity's or program's structure, biblical insight or influences and resources required to execute the activity or program. Three categories were identified as resounding themes illuminated from the pastor's responses: Comprehensive Vision, Community Engagement, and Biblical Insight and Resources.

Comprehensive Vision

Several pastors offered compelling statements of expression regarding the comprehensive vision of missional activities. Some presented the vision as a desire to develop missional programs, while others shared their continued advancement of operating missional activities and programs. Reverend Dr. Raymond Noble, pastor of Cedar Creek Baptist Church, Missionville, NC stated,

Our church is making an intentional effort to grow stronger in our missional efforts. We have a mission workshop scheduled at our church for the upcoming year. We will be financially assisting missionaries from our church and our local association on various mission trips locally and in Africa as well.²⁰

Similarly, to the vision of Rev. Dr. Noble, Pastor Ronnie Best, pastor of Bennettsville Freewill Baptist Church, Bennettsville SC explained,

At Bennettsville Freewill Baptist Church, we are in the midst of building a program. The church in its current state is not equipped or designed for 21st century ministry. With the building of our new facility, we will open a soup kitchen to feed the homeless, and thrift stores to ensure that people in the community are properly clothed. The training for each program or ministry will consist of partnering with local food pantries and shelters to ensure that we meet the needs of the community.²¹

Pastor Waverly Patrick shared the vision for missional engagement already realized at Risen Son Baptist Church, Breechville, SC. Pastor Patrick stated,

The ideal missional activity/program at Risen Son Baptist Church is one that is prayerful, practical, purposeful and perpetual. Thus, it includes training a missional team to pray targeted and specific prayers for the lost, unsaved, unchurched, and new believers. Secondly, we observe and survey the community needs, responding with family and friends' community events, such as collaborative holiday services which include Thanksgiving service providing cooked meals, and bags of food and dry goods to those in need. The establishment of a food pantry and clothing bank helps sustain an ongoing mission of service meeting needs in the community. We further provide a planned annual community outreach day with trained volunteers to minister salvation in a family, food, and fun-friendly environment. We further have "follow-up" counselors to contact new

20. Nobel, Questionnaire.

21.. Best, Questionnaire

converts immediately after each event to identify needs and thereby plan the ongoing mission within the neighborhood.²²

Pastor Patrick added:

We have programs which encompass a Missions Director, Evangelism Director, Food Pantry Leader, and Prayer Team. Each annual and quarterly event includes a planning team and works with the church budget team for annual budgeting. Leaders and workers received training via the SC Baptist Congress of Christian Education. Quarterly leadership training sessions, missions and evangelism curriculum resources, and training events are prescribed/designed by the pastor.²³

Reverend Dr. William Gerald, pastor of God of Hope Christian Center, Fairfield SC explained:

There is much teaching/preaching about missions and discipleship. We implemented “Take It to The Streets” in that we have held activities within the community to provide food and clothing to needy people. We have more activities planned. Some activities that we were planning to host at our church but we have relocated some to other places in the community. We also are working with other ministries to meet the needs of the community especially in poverty-stricken areas.²⁴

Dr. Gerald clarified:

Ideally, though, I want to see the church family reach out to the lost and needy without much prompting from leadership. The structure consists of: (A) Coordinators who have a heart and strong passion for missions and discipleship. These individuals will creatively reach out and engage people in the community with the love of Christ. They will seek out resources within the community for collaboration efforts to meet the needs of the community. They will also train others within the congregation to do likewise. (B) Strong youth leader who have a passion for training and living among young people and is very active in their lives. (C) Strong intercessors. A group of people who will listen to the Spirit of God and pray accordingly and consistently.²⁵

Pastor Harry Warren, pastor of Victory Peace Mission, East SC provided the comprehensive vision for missional activities and programs. Pastor Warren offered:

We teach the Word, as it relates to giving. We teach the role of believers to impact the world for Christ. We teach situational awareness regarding the plight and the needs of others in international countries. We have traveled on an international mission trip to

22. Waverly Patrick. “Missional Imagination Questionnaire. 2019.”

23. Patrick, Questionnaire.

24. Gerald, Questionnaire.

25. Johnson, Questionnaire.

Thailand and taught in local churches in the upper mountain region of Thailand. We have traveled internationally to get exposure to other countries and cultures. We encourage members to get involved with supporting international missions (i.e. prayer and fasting, special donations, *Operation Christmas Child*, etc.). We provide monthly financial sponsorship as a church for two orphanages in Thailand. We encourage members to make special donations to missions. The children in our Children's Church Ministry have stated a ministry initiative called, *Hardeeville Kidz Care—Kidz Matter Too*, which receives and donates funds for the two orphanages in Thailand. We share photos from international mission trips with the members of our church. We will connect with covering church to attend future international mission trips as approved by the Pastor.²⁶

Additionally, Pastor John Whitaker, pastor of Richard Allen AME Church, Allentown SC offered the following tenets for developing missional activities and programs:

Striving to create an awareness of God's mandate for missions. Bible studies, sermons, and workshops communicate the central purpose of salvation for the world. Every activity in the church is focused on God's principle purpose to make His name known throughout the earth. Apologetic emphasis in all studies help identify the foundational plan of God to save all believing mankind. Evangelistic activities performed to create a missionary mindset within the congregation. Relationship with international churches and other local churches conducting missionary activities help to create opportunities for involvement in mission programs.²⁷

Community Engagement

In addition to the pastors offering their comprehensive vision of missional activities, several pastors focused their missional agenda on developing their communities. Reverend Anthony Washington, pastor of Sunrise Baptist Church offered that the primary concern for developing missional activities and programs is

...to see growth throughout the church into the community. It provides better training for all churches in the area, working and training on how we handle our younger generation in order to address issues of imprisonment and pre-mature deaths.²⁸

26. Warren, Interview.

27. Whitaker, Questionnaire.

28. Nance. Interview.

Bishop Carlos Mendille, pastor of Solid Rock Christian Ministries provides additional context for focusing on communities. Bishop Carlos Mendille stated,

We teach and encourage our members to not only be mission minded in our immediate community, but as far reaching as they possibly can. We have taken on several projects in the past to support and undergird foreign mission projects that are done by ministries that we partner with. We also encourage our youth to be mission minded and we try to develop and organize local mission projects for them to engage in. We encourage our ministry to be the salt and light in the earth that Jesus told his disciples about. It our belief that everywhere we go, there is a mission harvest to be gathered.²⁹

In addition, Pastor Allen McCombs, pastor of Church of our Lord Christian Ministries, Bamberg SC shared,

The ideal missionary activity at our church would consist of addressing and ministering to the immediate needs of the community with love and compassion. After establishing a relationship, the church would share the Gospel to address the need for eternal salvation. Training would be provided so members would understand the importance of personal prayer, development of spiritual gifts, and understand how to share testimony as well as presenting the message of the Gospel. Resources would be drawn from those who bear fruit in this area.

Reverend Nathaniel Freeman, pastor of Holy Cross Christian Center added,

We try to help people in need, reach out into the community, and work with the business community to help assist people with food and clothing. We have a clothing store to help people and receive donations from others.³⁰

Additionally, Pastor Jamal Keith Sanford, pastor of Bible Voice Christian Center, Walterboro SC stated that the missional activities and programs at Bible Voice Christian Center sought to,

affect a spiritual change through sharing; affect a physical change by providing food, clothing and other needs they [community] may have; and, affect mental and emotional changes by teaching the word of God. One way of doing this is by the personal involvement of the congregation. The second way at doing this is by financially supporting other ministries that are doing the same thing.³¹

29. Mendille, Questionnaire.

30. Freeman, Interview.

31. Sanford, Questionnaire.

Biblical Insight and Resources

As aforementioned, question 20 requested that participating pastors identify what they deemed as the biblical insight and biblical resources that serve as inspiration and influence for missional activities and programs.

Pastor Ronnie Best identified this biblical inspiration and influence for missional activities and programs. The scripture reads,

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.³²

Pastor Roberta Norman, pastor of Peace Christian Tabernacle, Redgrove NC identified this biblical inspiration and influence for missional activities and programs at Peace Christian. It reads,

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.³³

Pastor Norman explained,

The weak and the fatherless, give justice to those affected and devastated, and rescues the weak and the needy. [Missional activities and programs seek] to partner with the Human Coalition team as they provide training to the congregation and work with women, children, and fathers to promote family from a Christian worldview. The church would provide housing, biblical teaching, parenting and practical skills that help to promote discipleship.³⁴

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.³⁵

32. James 1:27. New International Version.

33. Psalms 82:3. New International Version.

34. Norman, Questionnaire.

35. Ephesians 2:10. New International Version.

Reverend Dr. Larry Johnson, pastor of St. Philips Baptist Church, Buffalo NY offered,

The biblical insight is to share God's love with others and to meet their basic needs for food and clothing. ...Our church has a food pantry that services low income families and provides clothing as an outreach ministry for the elderly and the needy. Also, we have a Baptist Foreign Missions Society. The programs have been structured within the church leadership and pastor.³⁶

Summary

Chapter Five presented the data and analysis and summarized the research finding of this project. Creswell explained that exploratory and exploratory research study research should begin with the selection of a specific case.³⁷ The specific exploratory research study focus for this thesis-project was the African American church. The thesis-project was conducted with the primary goal of mining information obtained from church leaders of African American churches; thus, survey research design was used.

The research findings presented the principal and recurring themes that were primarily illuminated via the 20-item questionnaire and through the rich, detailed discussions between the researcher from interviews with selected church pastors of African American churches. The following bullets highlight the primary research findings and isolate identified common variables.

- In defining *missional imagination*, the majority of participating pastors incorporated some *Jesus Christ* in their definition. Several respondents included innovation and creativity within the context of their definition.

36. Johnson, Interview.

37. Creswell, "Research Design."

- 92.86 of the participating pastors indicated that they engage in teaching and/or preaching missional imagination to the congregation.
- 92.86% of pastors indicated that they initiate missional activities and programs based on the church's mission, addressing needs identified by the church leaders.
- 85.7% of pastors indicated that they initiate missional activities and programs based on the pastor's leadership agenda.
- 92.86% of pastors indicated that they initiate missional activities and programs based on God's mission for the church and community
- 92.86% of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed that the ultimate role of the pastor is to provide leadership to the congregation regarding missional imagination
- 92.86% of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed about the importance of developing missional imagination activities and programs with the congregation.
- 100 percent of pastors identified preaching as an appropriate program or activity for missions.
- 71.43% of pastors considered incarceration programs appropriate for missions.
- 64.29% of pastors indicated that homelessness ministries and local missions were appropriate missions.
- 64.29% of pastors indicated that fellowship was an appropriate activity for missions.
- 50% of pastors indicated that social justice was an appropriate activity or program for missions.
- 28.57% or less of participating pastors indicated that revivals, singing, fundraising, and politics were appropriate missional activities.
- 7.14% indicated that international activities were appropriate missional activities.

- The following programs and activities were identified as programs and activities that were inappropriate missional activities: politics (50%), fundraising (21.43%), singing (21.43%), social justice (21.43%), preaching (14.29%), revivals (14.29%), fellowship (7.14%), homelessness (7.14%) and incarceration (7.14%).
- 92.86% or 13 of the 14 participating pastors identified preaching as the most common missional activity that participating churches initiated.
- Homelessness ministries was identified as the second most resounding activity as an existing church program at 64.29% or by 9 pastors.
- Ten of the fourteen pastors or 71.43%, indicated that Matthew 28:19-20 was the best scripture to contextualize missional imagination.
- The second most common scriptures identified by 35.71% or five pastors were Acts 1:8 and Mark 16:15. The only additional common scripture identified by 14.29% or two pastors was Acts 13:47.
- Unanimously, all fourteen or 100% of the pastors, indicated that the Apostle Paul was one of the best biblical figures to contextualize missional imagination.
- The second most common biblical figure identified by 71.43% or ten pastors was Jesus Christ.
- Pastors identified two additional shared biblical figures who provided context for understanding missional imagination, The Apostle Peter was identified by 42.86% or six pastors. While, the Apostle John was identified by 14.29% or two pastors.
- Abraham, David, Isiah, Luke, Matthew, Nehemiah, and Phillip were additional Biblical figures shared by pastors that best provide biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching missional imagination.

- 57.14% or 8 of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed that there are biblical differences and understanding among the use of the terms mission(s), missiology, missional imagination, and spiritual formation
- 100% or 14 of the pastors indicated that their congregation were encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs.
- 57.14% or 8 pastors indicated that their local community was encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs.
- 57.14% or 8 pastors indicated that the international community was encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs.

The primary goal of the 20-item questionnaire was to ascertain the perceptions and understanding of missional imagination by pastors and church leaders of African American churches. The research identified three categories as resounding themes illuminated from the pastors' responses: Comprehensive Vision, Community Engagement, and Biblical Insight and Resources. Chapter Six will provide an overview of the completed research, including a critical discussion and evaluation.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

Chapter Six provided an exhaustive evaluation of the survey responses and a discussion of the common themes that were illuminated in the project, *Missional Imagination in the African American Church*, and shared the *Summary and Conclusions* and *Implications for Further Research*. The purpose of the study was to understand unique features of a phenomenon in its natural setting, that is, the African American church.¹ The ultimate purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how pastors of African American churches understand the issue of missional imagination. The research was conducted from the vantage point of the researcher having served as a pastor and church leader of an African American church for over twenty years and has witnessed a strong focus and commitment to mission programs. From the onset, through observations and direct experiences, the researcher observed that missions in the African American church primarily focused on addressing needs identified by church leaders based upon the church's mission. At first sight, there was seemingly not an issue with an African American church aligning its ministries directly with the church's mission. However, upon much reflection and resonance based on the scholarly literature on missional imagination, the researcher experienced an epiphany compelling further investigation of the phenomenon of African American churches and missional imagination. The vision of the researcher was that through this project-thesis, he would be able to investigate the issue missional imagination in the African American church and provide practical insight for church leaders for future

1. Creswell, "Research Design."

developments. Further, the project-thesis sought to illuminate the reality of church leaders expending their time, energy and efforts in fulfilling the church's mission or in some cases towards fulfilling their own personal agendas, instead of truly searching to find out what God's mission is for the church and the community.

Extended Discussion on Common Themes

Chapter Five provided an overview of the data and presented an analysis and summary of the research findings of the research project. Essentially, Chapter Five summarized the survey responses and presented the most captivating data as common themes illuminated from the current research study. As Creswell suggested, "data should be analyzed through a description of the case and themes of the case as well as through cross-case themes".² The data analysis process for the current research project allowed the researcher to develop data analysis of one or more themes.³ As such, the data analysis process for this qualitative exploratory research study examined the resounding themes illuminated from the questionnaire and interviews (See Appendix A). This data analysis process permitted the researcher to summarize the common themes that were identified as the principal common themes and central issues illuminated from the participating pastors. The identified and shared common themes were deemed to be the best and common practices and the best advice offered by the participating pastors of the African American churches, from their perspectives and in their own words. However, the researcher also recognized and acknowledged individual and isolated recommendations. For example, regarding in the Biblical contexts for understanding missional imagination, overwhelmingly pastors identified common scriptures that address the theological phenomenon of missional

2. Creswell, "Research Design."

3. Creswell, "Research Design."

imagination. However, understanding the passion and Holy spirit-led responses from the participating pastors, the researcher included the comprehensive identification of scriptures and biblical figures as detailed in chapter five and reviewed below in *Biblical Insight and Resources* as a guide for exploring the theological phenomenon of missional imagination.

Comprehensive Vision

As aforementioned, the researcher purported that the catalyst for this research thesis-project was revealed through his own observations and direct experiences. To reiterate, the researcher observed that missions in the African American church primarily focused on addressing needs identified by church leaders based upon the church's mission. Viewed as by the researcher and as a critical problem within the African American church, the project-thesis sought to illuminate if church leaders expend their time, energy and efforts in fulfilling the church's mission or in some cases their own personal agendas, instead of truly searching to find out what God's mission is for the church and the community. The responses from the participating pastors overwhelmingly contradicted the initial speculation of the researcher. In fact, when asked if missional activities and programs initiated at the participating churches were determined primarily focused on addressing God's mission for the church and community, 92.86% of pastors indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed. As such, the common lessons learned from the participating pastors was the comprehensive vision for the African American church should indeed build missional activities and programs based upon and focused on God's mission for the church and community as opposed to the church's mission of the pastors' personal agenda. From the responses of the participating pastors, this scripture resonated with the researcher. It reads,

And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.⁴

In *The Power of Vision*, Kris Vallotton stated,

Without a vision, a plainly written strategic plan, we perish or go “unrestrained,” as the New American Standard Bible puts it. Vision gives pain a purpose and those without vision spend their lives taking the path of least resistance as they try to avoid discomfort. The level of sacrifice that a vision requires will determine the size of people who follow. Sacrifice separates the small from the great.⁵

Comprehensive vision bridges the present and the future⁶ and should serve as the foundational guide for the development for missional imagination in the African American church. In hindsight, the researcher laments not providing specific inquiries as to whether or not the vision for missional imagination was officially incorporated within the church. In fact, the researcher may have deliberately asked the participating pastors to expound upon the topic of comprehensive vision for engagement and implementation of missional imagination. Specifically, the researcher could have inquired if the comprehensive vision was “written” plainly as a component in the church’s strategic plan, or a written component of the church’s vision statement, or written component as church goals or objectives.

Incorporating *Missional Imagination* in the Church’s Vision Statement

In *Growing Healthy Churches Together*, Thom Rainer offered a blueprint that may be used by pastors of African American churches and others in their review and construction of church vision statements. Deliberate incorporate of missional imagination in church mission comprehensive incorporation of missional imagination in the African American church. Rainer

4. Habakkuk 2:2 King James Version (KJV).

5. Kris Vallotton. “The Power of Vision.” October 8, 2009. <https://jesusculture.com/posts/1450-the-power-of-a-vision/>

6. Vallotton, “Power of Vision.”

supported that church vision statements must be memorable, succinct, and connected to the church's discipleship process and admonished that if the mission statement does not, then the mission will either fail or be ineffective.⁷ Further, Rainer offered the following guidelines for incorporation of effective church vision statements:

- A vision statement is God's specific plan for a specific church at a specific time.
- Too many vision statements are abstract and don't click with the people in a church.
- The vision statement of your church should mirror your church's discipleship process.
- Every ministry in your church should align with your discipleship process and, as a result, your vision statement.
- Vision statements fail when they are not actionable and are poorly communicated.
- Ongoing reminders of the vision statement are required to make it stick with the members.⁸

Rainer stated that the six elements of a church vision statement are:

1. The vision statement must be biblical.
2. Have the vision statement mirror your discipleship process.
3. Keep the vision statement succinct and memorable.
4. Ensure your ministries align with the vision statement.
5. Develop an ongoing vehicle to communicate the vision statement to the members (front end, continuous).
6. Communicate expectations of the members in the vision statement.⁹

Pastor Ronnie Best, pastor of First Baptist Church of Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York

helped to clarify the importance of stating the mission. Pastor Best stated:

The mission of the local church is clearly defined in Matthew 28:19. The methods of how we reach those who don't know the Christ and for those who are in need, must evolve. We must continue to fine-tune how we communicate the Gospel. I define missional imagination as the mission must state the same, but the method must continue to evolve.¹⁰

7. Thom S. Rainer. "Growing Healthy Churches Together." 2015
<https://thomrainer.com/2015/07/crafting-a-church-vision-statement-rainer-on-leadership-143/>

8. Rainer, "Healthy Churches."

9. Rainer, "Healthy Churches."

10. Best, Questionnaire.

In each response and in their crafted definitions of *missional imagination*, participating pastors provided sound counsel for incorporating *missional imagination* as a component of the comprehensive vision. The pastors highlighted the importance spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and sharing the *Good News of Jesus Christ* as the catalyst for the comprehensive vision.

Pastor Troy Campbell, pastor of South Center of Christ Missionary Baptist Church Christian Center, Columbia SC, emphasized the need for innovation and creativity in establishing missional imagination in the African American church. Pastor Campbell stated:

As a church leader, I define missional imagination as our ability to see new and creative ways to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe missional imagination is allowing God to show us effective ways to reach our communities and the world without limitations.¹¹

Thus, the research admonished that in the development of comprehensive vision of *missional imagination*, that African American churches must write *missional imagination* into the church's vision statement as a plain and deliberate component of the vision and strategic plan with specified goals and objectives.

Community Engagement

From its emergence in the late 18th century to its present-day relevance, the African American Church has and will always serve as a safe haven for African Americans, a place to worship God together, and a place where African Americans are motivated to rebuild Black communities.¹² Research question number 3 was How can a Missional Imagination be developed in the African American church while respecting its culture practices? The question paralleled the notion of rebuilding and maintaining the African American community.

Participating pastors unanimously agreed that comprehensive community engagement through missional activities and programs were important and should be implemented.

11. Campbell, Questionnaire.

12. Pinn, A. B. "The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era." Orbis Books.

Pastor Alfred Nance, pastor of St. Peter A.M.E. Church, North SC, framed the understanding for community engagement and missional imagination. Pastor Washington highlighted missional imagination as:

Service outside the walls of the church into the community. Also, cultivating the membership into disciples.¹³

100 percent of pastors identified preaching as an appropriate program or activity for missions.

Dr. William Gerald, pastor of God of Hope Christian Center, Fairfield SC explained:

There is much teaching/preaching about missions and discipleship. We implemented “Take It to The Streets” in that we have held activities within the community to provide food and clothing to needy people. We have more activities planned. Some activities that we were planning to host at our church but we have relocated some to other places in the community. We also are working with other ministries to meet the needs of the community especially in poverty-stricken areas.¹⁴

Dr. Gerald clarified:

Ideally, though, I want to see the church family reach out to the lost and needy without much prompting from leadership. The structure consists of: (A) Coordinators who have a heart and strong passion for missions and discipleship. These individuals will creatively reach out and engage people in the community with the love of Christ. They will seek out resources within the community for collaboration efforts to meet the needs of the community. They will also train others within the congregation to do likewise. (B) Strong youth leader who have a passion for training and living among young people and is very active in their lives. (C) Strong intercessors. A group of people who will listen to the Spirit of God and pray accordingly and consistently.¹⁵

The following programs and activities were identified as programs and activities that were inappropriate missional activities: politics, fundraising, singing, social justice, preaching, revivals, fellowship, homelessness and incarceration.

13. Nance, Interview.

14. Johnson, Questionnaire.

15. Johnson, Questionnaire.

Regarding social justice, Pastor Troy Campbell, pastor of South Center of Christ Missionary Baptist Church, Columbia MD offered:

While social justice is important and definitely has its place as it is always appropriate to protect the rights of human beings, we have to ensure that we are not creating barriers that may make it impossible to reach those from other cultures. Also, our political views may differ from those in which we are attempting to reach which can create additional barriers that make it difficult to share the Gospel.¹⁶

Although less than 10% of participating pastors indicated that their churches actually engaged in international activities as missional activities, some pastors viewed international engagement an important component in cultivating missional imagination.

Pastor Harry Warren, pastor of Victory Peace Mission, East SC, emphasized the importance of innovation in international and outreach missions. Pastor Warren stated that missional activities and programs include:

Utilizing creative initiatives and “outside-the-box” thinking to conduct and/or support international missions and outreach ministries to reach, teach, and provide assistance for people in foreign lands, outside of one’s native/home country as led by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

Reverend Dr. Raymond Noble, pastor of Cedar Creek Baptist Church, Missionville NC indicated that:

Our church is making an intentional effort to grow stronger in our missional efforts. We have a mission workshop scheduled at our church for the upcoming year. We will be financially assisting missionaries from our church and our local association on various mission trips locally and in Africa as well.¹⁸

Bishop Carlos Mendille, pastor of Solid Rock Christian Church, Langston SC offered:

Missional imagination as I understand it is the awareness of the need and opportunity for missions locally and abroad as well as the incorporation of it in our church culture.¹⁹

16. Campbell, Questionnaire.

17. Warren, Interview.

18. Noble, Questionnaire.

19. Mendille, Questionnaire

Although participating pastors were on one accord regarding the importance of community engagement through missional activities and programs, the researcher found it imperative to identify usual frameworks for the implementation of the community engagement within the African American church.

Cultivating *Missional Imagination* through Community Engagement

In *Cultivating 'Missional Imagination'*, Joe Bjordal provides sound recommendations for framing community engagement from the vantage point of missional imagination. Through a critical dialogic of missional imagination and community engagement, Bjordal stated:

There was also no illusion that significant challenges and needs exist, such as changing the narrative “from church to God”; redefining the role of clergy in ministry development; identifying and equipping lay leaders; teaching and cultivating a “posture of listening”; cultivating a culture of deep formation as lifelong practice; fear of failure and many more.²⁰

As African American churches continue to cultivate missional imagination and to develop and hone ways to engage their communities in meaningful ways, many African American congregations struggle to figure out a means of consistently engaging those in their community and meeting present-day needs.

Pastor Ronnie Best, pastor of Bennettsville Freewill Baptist Church, Bennettsville SC explained:

At Bennettsville Freewill Baptist Church, we are in the midst of building a program. The church in its current state is not equipped or designed for 21st century ministry. With the building of our new facility, we will open a soup kitchen to feed the homeless, and thrift stores to ensure that people in the community are properly clothed. The training for each program or ministry will consist of partnering with local food pantries and shelters to ensure that we meet the needs of the community.²¹

20. Joe Bjordal, “Cultivating ‘Missional Imagination’.” January 26, 2014
<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/cultivating-'missional-imagination'>

21. Best, Questionnaire.

Offering practical insight into how churches can more effectively connect with and establish missional activities and programs for its neighbors, Powe and Marullo presented the 4-1 Model in *4 Key Practices of Community Engagement*. The authors offered a 4-step guide to development of missional activities and programs. The first step is *Inquiry*. Powe and Marullo explained,

Inquiry is being intentional about examining the world as it is. Inquiry seeks to discover both the challenges of the world around us — the places where we see God’s heart breaking — and the gifts and blessings that are already present in the community. Inquiry uses observation and ministry tools like MissionInsite (Census tools) to understand the community context and the ministries already in place.²²

Powe and Marullo explained that the key is for the church to enter into the community with an understanding and appreciation of the cultural complexity it contains and a sensitivity to its diversity.²³ They emphasized that the role of the church is not to come in as experts but with an openness to understanding what is already taking place.²⁴ Powe and Marullo entered the community with questions to learn from the community the strengths and values that “bring it life.”²⁵ Church leaders and congregations should enter with eyes and hearts that are open and keenly seeking the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to appreciate the reconciling and redeeming work that is already underway²⁶ Using this approach, the church is not viewed as merely doing things to the community, but the church is viewed as seeking to learn the ways the community and as taking the time for inquiry to ingratiate a congregation with its community.²⁷

22. Doug Powe and Sam Marullo. “4 Key Practices of Community Engagement.” March 13, 2019. 339

23. Powe and Marullo, “4 Key Practices.”

24. Powe and Marullo, “4 Key Practices.”

25. Powe and Marullo, “4 Key Practices.”

26. Powe and Marullo, “4 Key Practices.”

27. Powe and Marullo, “4 Key Practices.”

The second step is *Imagination*. Powe and Marullo stated,

Imagination involves asking ourselves, “What could be done if God’s will were done on earth as it is in heaven?” We seek wisdom from those that have come before us and those in the community. From those who have come before us, we learn about “promising practices” that can help spark ideas for our context. We enter into relationships to understand better the wisdom and inspiration of the community with which we are engaged. It is critical that we do not ignore our traditions and our sacred stories for inspiration as to how we are to respond. And we pray for the guidance and wisdom of the Spirit to inspire us with glimpses of the Reign of God that will draw us in closer.²⁸

The response is not the typical model of the church figuring out how to deliver goods. Rather, the response is about seeking approaches that include everyone in the community collaborating to make a difference. While those in the community may not share our theological language, imagining this sort of response is our effort to participate in the reign of God.²⁹

The third step is *Incarnation*. Powe and Marullo offered,

Christians typically speak of Jesus becoming incarnate in human form and being with us. God literally becomes human and experiences all the particularities of life. An incarnational approach to community ministry means learning and practicing in a contextual manner. An incarnational approach requires connecting with individuals who have a stake in a particular community. This means connecting with religious leaders, parishioners, residents, business owners, unhoused individuals, and all others. An incarnational approach to community ministry is not simply church or agency focused. It calls us to “live into” our communities in real and present ways. We embody a new way of being a faith community. The work we do is not about a selfish interest that benefits the church. We live out our biblical story of incarnation and seek to help the community to experience God’s transforming love, grace, and justice.

The fourth step is *Imminence*. Powe and Marullo explained,

For Christians this term focuses on our hope for the transformation that is occurring and is yet to come. As Christians we are participating in God’s work of transformation when we encourage those in the community to live into what God is doing. This means working with the partners in the community to make a concrete difference. It means doing something that is measurable, while understanding that the work we do is never the final word and that God’s work of transformation is ongoing. Too often we start

28. Powe and Marullo, “4 Key Practices.”

29. Powe and Marullo, “4 Key Practices.”

something in the community and see it as a quick fix or, at the other extreme, we never develop measurements to determine what difference we are making. Imminence recognizes we must negotiate an ongoing ministry response that requires ongoing metrics.³⁰

As aforementioned, effective community ministry is inquisitive, imaginative, incarnational, and imminent. The researcher views the four key practices of as critical in the cultivation of missional community engagement within the African American church.

Biblical Insight and Resources

The guiding principle and biblical inspirations for the current research reads, Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.³¹

¹⁵ And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.³²

Pastor John Whitaker, pastor of Haskell Heights First Baptist Church, Columbia SC, stated:

I would replace the term missional imagination with the words: missionary mindset. The vision of the church, our thought patterns, and programming stem from our commitment to a missionary mandate.³³

These are commonly shared theological principles and biblical passages well known for their importance in discussions of missional imagination found in the command given by Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Mark. When asked to share a scripture that best provides the biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching the tenets of missional

30. Powe and Marullo, "4 Key Practices."

31. Matthew 28: 19-20. New International Version (NIV).

32. Mark 16:15 King James Version (KJV).

33. Whitaker, Questionnaire.

imagination, participating pastors, eleven of the fourteen, indicated that the following was the best scripture:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.³⁴

The only additional common scripture identified by just two pastors was,

For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”³⁵

Pastor Roberta Norman, pastor of Victory Christian Center, Charlotte NC identified a biblical inspiration and influence for missional activities and programs at Victory Christian Center:

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.³⁶

Pastor Norman explained,

The scripture vindicates the weak and the fatherless, give justice to those affected and devastated, and rescues the weak and the needy. [Missional activities and programs seek] to partner with the Human Coalition team as they provide training to the congregation and work with women, children, and fathers to promote family from a Christian worldview. The church would provide housing, biblical teaching, parenting and practical skills that help to promote discipleship.³⁷

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.³⁸

34. Acts 1:8. New International Version (NIV).

35. Acts 13:47. New International Version (NIV).

36. Psalms 82:3. New International Version.

37. Norman, Questionnaire.

38. Ephesians 2:10. New International Version.

Reverend Dr. Larry Johnson, pastor of St. Philips Baptist Church, Buffalo NY offered,

The biblical insight is to share God's love with others and to meet their basic needs for food and clothing. ... Our church has a food pantry that services low income families and provides clothing as an outreach ministry for the elderly and the needy. Also, we have a Baptist Foreign Missions Society. The programs have been structured within the church leadership and pastor.³⁹

Participating pastors identified the following comprehensive list of scriptures as relevant for that best provide the biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching the tenets of missional imagination: Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8, Mark 16:15, Act 13:47, Acts, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, Acts 26: 18-20, I Corinthians 13, Jeremiah 45:3, John 4, Luke 4:18, Mark 5:35, Matthew 9:35-36, Matthew 10:1, 5-8, Matthew 16:18, Matthew 24:14, Matthew 25: 31-46, Philippians 4:15-16, Revelations 5:9, Revelations 7:9, Romans 1:16, Romans 2:11-16, Romans 10:13-14, Titus 2:11, Titus 2:12, Titus 2:13, and Titus 2:14.

When asked to share three (3) biblical figures that best provide the biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching the tenets of missional imagination, participating pastors, all fourteen participating pastors indicated that the Apostle Paul was one of the best biblical figures to contextualize missional imagination. The second most common identified biblical figure identified by eleven of the fourteen pastors was Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter was identified by six pastors. Also, pastors identified two additional shared biblical figures who provided context for understanding missional imagination. The Apostle John and the Apostle Philip were identified by two pastors. Although there were no other common biblical figures shared by the participating pastors, the following are the individual biblical figures shared by pastors that best provide biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching missional imagination: Abraham, David, Isiah, Luke, Matthew, and Nehemiah. Participating pastors

39. Johnson, Interview.

identified the following comprehensive list of biblical figures as relevant for that best provide the biblical context for understanding, preaching, and/or teaching the tenets of missional imagination: Paul, Jesus Christ, Peter, John, Phillip, Abraham, Aquila, Barnabas, David, Isiah, Luke, Matthew, Nehemiah, Priscilla, Silas, Timothy, and Titus. Understanding the heightened passion and Holy spirit-led responses from the participating pastors, the researcher included the comprehensive identification of scriptures and biblical figures even if the scripture or biblical figure was identified by a single participating pastor.

Summary and Conclusions

As aforementioned in the introduction and in the review of literature, the researcher concluded the most significant issues facing pastors of African American churches in their quest to establish missional churches are the issues: (1) these ministries and missions often reflect the direct needs and desires of those people already attending, but do not necessarily reflect the needs of those in the community because they are not developed through genuine engagement and direct conversation with the community;⁴⁰ (2) the African American church is historically operated based on an autocratic, top-down leadership model; and, (3) a truly devoted missional church does not focus on itself, its delegated mission or on the leader's personal agenda, but on what God is doing in the neighborhood.⁴¹ As previously articulated as the guiding principle for this work, the primary goal of the study was mining information obtained from church leaders of African American churches, with the ultimate goal of gaining an in-depth understanding of how church leaders understand the issue of missional imagination. All participating pastors were significant as they were "real-life" participants in the African American church that shared their

40. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

41. Roxburgh and Romanuk, "Missional Leader."

perspectives the topic, *Missional Imagination* from their vantage point and in their own words.

Participating pastors described the missional activity's or program's structure, biblical insight or influences and resources required to execute the missional activities or programs. Three categories were identified as resounding themes illuminated from the pastor's responses: Comprehensive Vision, Community Engagement, and Biblical Insight and Resources. The ultimate revelation illuminated from the participating pastors as articulated through this research was that pastors of African American churches were indeed putting forth a concerted effort to develop missional churches. The operative research finding was that current and future development of the missional churches was based on God's will and mission and not on the church's mission or the pastor's leadership agenda.

Implications for Practice

The research project sought to provide some practical disciplines that will encourage and equip the African American church to live out its faith in communicating the gospel outside of its walls and out into the world. The following are practical theology methods illuminating from this current research study, from others who have studied this topic and written on it, and from Scripture and personal experiences. The research admonished pastors, church leaders, and congregations should consider the following tenets in the reframing and development of a missional church. In the development of the missional church, pastors, church leaders and congregations must:

- (1) Write the comprehensive vision into the church's vision statement as a plain and deliberate component of the vision and strategic plan with specified goals and objectives.
- (2) Change the church's narrative and disposition "from church to God".
- (3) Redefine the role of the clergy for true missional ministry development.

- (4) Identify and equip lay leaders.
- (5) Teach and cultivate a “posture of listening.”
- (6) Cultivate a culture of deep formation as a lifelong practice.⁴²

Implications for Further Research

This qualitative descriptive analysis included fourteen pastors from African American churches. The pastors participating in the project represented four states: ten from South Carolina, and one each from the states of Maryland, New York, and North Carolina. Thirteen of the pastors were men; one participant was a woman. Future research on the topic may increase the number of pastors and include additional women to strengthen the perspectives on the topic of developing the missional church. Additional research might expand the scope of inquiry to include to what degree pastors implement a written comprehensive vision of missional imagination.

Thus, African American church has long been the center of communities. The primary concern for the African American church is the lack of witnessed passion, strategic planning, spiritual development and commitment toward missions that focus on the advancement of the gospel within the local community and throughout the world within the African American church. Thus, this project sought to engage and challenge African American churches to shift from the church trying to accomplish its missions to the imagining and carrying out God’s mission. My devout prayer is that African American churches develop missional imagination within the church based upon spiritual formation among the leadership and laity regarding taking the gospel beyond the walls of the church into the neighborhoods and into the world. To God be the glory.

42. Bjordal, “Missional Imagination.”

APPENDIX

MISSIONAL IMAGINATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Church: _____

Address: _____

Pastor: _____

Interview Date if applicable: _____

1. As a church leader, how do you define *missional imagination*?

2. Do you teach/preach *missional imagination* to your congregation? (Please check one.)

_____ Yes _____ No

3. Missional activities and programs initiated at your church are determined primarily focused on addressing needs identified by church leaders based upon the church's mission. (Please check one.)

_____Strongly Disagree _____Disagree _____Neutral _____Agree _____Strongly Agree

4. Missional activities and programs initiated at your church are determined primarily focused on addressing pastor's personal leadership agenda. (Please check one.)

_____Strongly Disagree _____Disagree _____Neutral _____Agree _____Strongly Agree

5. Missional activities and programs initiated at your church are determined primarily focused on addressing God's mission for the church and community. (Please check one.)

_____Strongly Disagree _____Disagree _____Neutral _____Agree _____Strongly Agree

6. It is the ultimate role to the pastor to provide leadership to the congregation regarding missional imagination. (Please check one.)

_____Strongly Disagree _____Disagree _____Neutral _____Agree _____Strongly Agree

7. It is the ultimate role of the pastor's designee to provide leadership to the congregation regarding missional imagination. (Please check one.)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. How important is teaching and or preaching missional imagination to your congregation? (Please check one.)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. How important is the development of missional imagination activities and programs to your congregation? (Please check one.)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

10. Which of the following programs or activities do you consider **appropriate** for missions and the culture at your church and for your congregation? Please check all that apply.

Preaching _____ Singing _____ Fellowship _____ Politics _____
 Social Justice _____ Homelessness _____ Incarceration _____ Fundraising _____
 Revivals _____
 Local Missions _____ (Please Explain) _____

International Missions _____ (Please Explain) _____

11. Which of the following programs or activities do you consider **inappropriate** for missions and the culture at your church and for your congregation? Please check all that apply.

Preaching _____ Singing _____ Fellowship _____ Politics _____
 Social Justice _____ Homelessness _____ Incarceration _____ Fundraising _____
 Revivals _____
 Local Missions _____ (Please Explain) _____

International Missions _____ (Please Explain) _____

12. What mission programs or activities have you initiated at your church? Please check all that apply.

Preaching _____ Singing _____ Fellowship _____ Politics _____
 Social Justice _____ Homelessness _____ Incarceration _____ Fundraising _____
 Revivals _____
 Local Missions _____ (Please Explain) _____

International Missions _____ (Please Explain) _____

Other _____ (Please Explain) _____

13. What three (3) scriptures best provide the biblical context for understanding, preaching or teaching *missional imagination*?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

14. What three (3) biblical figures best provide the biblical context for understanding, preaching or teaching *missional imagination*?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

15. There are biblical differences and understanding among the use of the terms mission[s],

missiology, missional imagination, and spiritual formation. (Please check one.)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

16. The ultimate purpose for missions is to express God's love and plan for all mankind throughout the world with the focus on God's mission. (Please check one.)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

17. Are members of your congregation encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue

regarding identification of missional activities and programs? (Please check one.)

Yes No

18. Are members of the local community encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs? (Please check one.)

Yes No

19. Are members of the international community encouraged to communicate and engage in open dialogue regarding identification of missional activities and programs? (Please check one.)

Yes No

20. Describe the contents of the ideal missional activity or program desired at your church. Describe the activity's or program's structure, training, Biblical insight, and resources.

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VITA

Born February 21, 1963, Norman Eli Curlee, a native of Brooklyn, New York, is Senior Pastor and founder of Word Alive Church, a non-denominational church located in Southeast Columbia, South Carolina. He spent his early childhood in Winnsboro, South Carolina, where he received his early education through the Fairfield Public School System. After graduation from high school, Pastor Curlee served in the United States Navy and Naval Reserve. Pastor Curlee studied Business Management at Voorhees College, Denmark, South Carolina in 1985. He transferred to Midlands Technical College, Columbia, South Carolina in 1986, where he continued to study Business Management. He received the Master of Divinity degree with a concentration in Spiritual Formation and Pastoral Counseling. Pastor Curlee is presently pursuing his Doctorate in Ministry with a concentration in Christian Leadership at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is expected to complete the Doctor of Ministry in December, 2019. Pastor Curlee is the recipient of many awards, accommodations and certificates throughout his naval, college and civilian career. God has richly blessed and anointed Pastor Curlee in areas of teaching, preaching, exhortation and leadership. His passion is to see believers live a life of victory and purpose in carrying out God's agenda in the earth. He believes God has designed the family as a witness of His unity and wisdom in the earth. As this unity is maintained and enriched, believers will be more effective in their abilities to shine as Christ light in this present world. Pastor Curlee is a husband, father and mentor. Servant leadership is the heartbeat of his motivation in ministry.